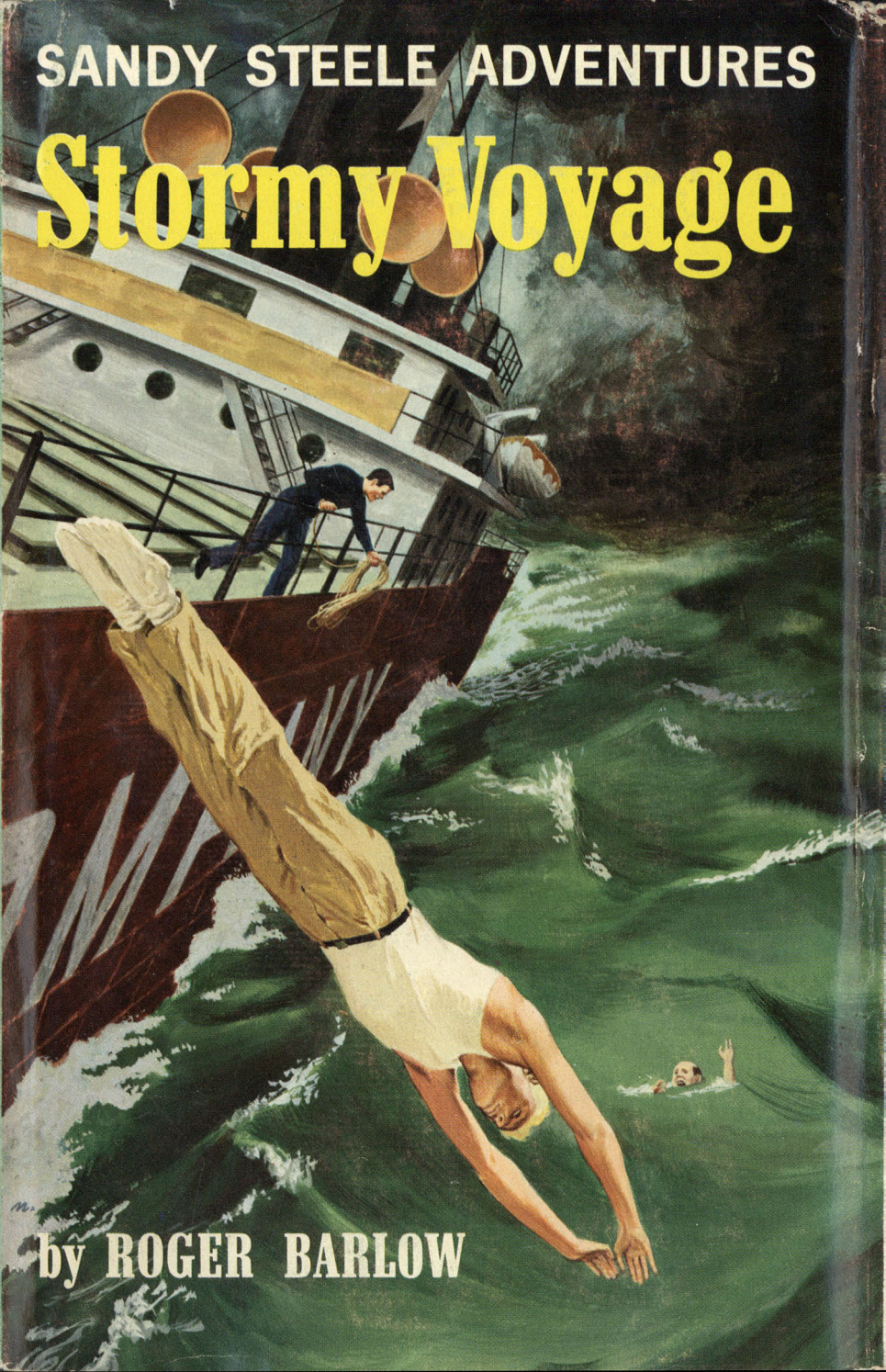
SANDY STEELE ADVENTURES

Stormy Voyage



by ROGER BARLOW

By an unlooked-for series of events, Sandy Steele and Jerry James found themselves shipping as deck hands on one of the "long boats" that carry freight on the Great Lakes.

It would have been, ordinarily, an interesting summer of work and fun—except that the boys very soon realized that some members of the crew were in a treacherous plot to get the shipping line away from its owner.

The account of the boys' difficulties as virtual prisoners on the long boat and of the final open conflict makes an exciting story of adventure.

$1.00

SANDY STEELE ADVENTURES

by Roger Barlow

If this is the first Sandy Steele Adventure you have read, you will undoubtedly want to know more about Sandy and his friends. The back of the jacket lists other titles in the series. Choose any one of them and be sure of entertaining reading.

Whether Sandy is at home in Valley View, California, or traveling about the country, he meets interesting people and finds exciting things to do. Join him on his adventures and have fun!

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SANDY STEELE ADVENTURES

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Stormy Voyage

ROGER BARLOW

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Stormy Voyage

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by

ROGER BARLOW

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SANDY STEELE Adventures

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SANDY STEELE ADVENTURES

BLACK TREASURE

DANGER AT MORMON CROSSING

STORMY VOYAGE

FIRE AT RED LAKE

SECRET MISSION TO ALASKA

TROUBLED WATERS

Sandy Steele Adventures

STORMY VOYAGE

BY ROGER BARLOW

SIMON AND SCHUSTER
New York, 1959

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The GREAT LAKES
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Two Harbors
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Lake Superior
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WISCONSIN
MICHIGAN
Lake Michigan
Lake Huron
Georgian Bay
CANADA
Lake Ontario
Niagara Falls
Buffalo
Milwaukee
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Chicago
Detroit
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NEW YORK
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STORMY VOYAGE

CHAPTER ONE

Off to the Mesabi

JERRY JAMES'S FOOT came down gently on the brake pedal of Old Faithful, his cut-down, open-air jalopy, and as the car slowed, Sandy Steele vaulted lightly over the side onto the pavement. With a wave of his hand and the shout, "See you tonight, Jerry," Sandy whirled and sprinted up the front walk.

His long, gangling legs gobbled up the distance with astonishing ease and catapulted Sandy up the porch steps three at a time. But then, after the screen door had slammed shut behind him, Sandy Steele came to a sudden halt as though tackled by an entire enemy football team.

"Dad!" he cried. "But I thought you'd be in Alaska by now!"

"Signals off, Sandy," John Steele said, rising from the porch hammock and laying aside his evening newspaper. He gazed soberly at his tall, blond son. "You know, Sandy," he went on, "I believe you've grown another two inches in the few days I've been away."

"It's Mom's cooking," Sandy said, smiling. He brushed aside the cowlick that had flopped over his eyes as he ran up the walk. His face resumed its normal expression of quiet thoughtfulness, and he said, "What happened, Dad?"

"Change of plans, Sandy. Instead of testing for uranium in Alaska, the government has decided that I'd better spend the summer on the Mesabi Range."

"Mesabi?" Sandy repeated, frowning. Then, brightening, he exclaimed, "Oh sure. That's in Minnesota. The ore mines. Mr. Wilson told us all about it in class the other day. Why are you going there instead of to Alaska, Dad?"

John Steele's face became grave.

"I don't know how much your teacher told you about the Mesabi iron-ore mines, son. But the truth is that these ore deposits are among our country's greatest treasures." His voice turned grim. "And I'm afraid they're running out."

Sandy looked perplexed. "But I thought there

were whole mountains of ore up there. At least, that's what Mr. Wilson said."

"Your teacher's right, Sandy. But, unfortunately, most of these deposits are of low-grade ore. As the son of a government geologist, you should know what that means." Sandy nodded soberly and automatically lifted a hand to brush back the cowlick that had fallen forward again. His father continued, "The average iron content of the Mesabi ore has been dropping pretty steadily. If it gets much below 50 per cent, it would be doubtful if it would be worth working. And the Mesabi, son—the Mesabi is the greatest producer of iron ore in the world."

"Gee," Sandy said. "That *is* serious, isn't it?"

"Couldn't be worse, son. From iron ore comes steel, and steel is the backbone of any modern nation. That's why it's important for somebody to uncover some high-grade deposits. And that," he said, smiling at the expression of deep seriousness on the face of his son, "that explains why John Steele will spend his summer in Minnesota instead of Alaska."

Suddenly he laughed. Leaning forward, he ruffled Sandy's hair.

"Come, now. There are other important things in the world. Such as the score of this afternoon's

game between Valley View and Poplar City. You haven't told me who won yet."

Sandy grinned jubilantly. "We did," he said. "Three to nothing."

"Oh, ho! Shut 'em out, eh? How many strike-outs?"

"Twelve," Sandy said, blushing. "But you should have seen the homer Jerry hit! Boy! It must have traveled close to four hundred feet in the air. Honestly, Dad, Jerry James could play in the big leagues if he wanted to. Why, he's got a big-league arm already. Today he caught two men trying to steal second and he picked another man off third."

Inwardly pleased at his son's refusal to boast of his shut-out victory, John Steele said, "Well, the pitching helps, too, Sandy." He turned to lead the way into the dining room of their comfortable home, when he was stopped in his tracks by a cry of dismay from Sandy.

"What's wrong, son?" he said, turning. "What is it?"

"Alaska!" Sandy burst out. "Don't you remember, Dad? Jerry and I were going to join you in Alaska this summer! That's why we'd saved all the money we made at Mr. James's drugstore."

Sandy's father struck his forehead with the flat

of his hand. "By George, I'd forgotten all about it," he said.

"Yes," Sandy said, dejected. "It looks as if Jerry James and I will be the only ones around Valley View this summer." His face darkened. "Pepper March is going to South America with his father. Won't he rub it in when he hears that our Alaska trip is off!" He shook his head. "And Quiz Taylor's got a job as counselor at a boys' camp."

"Oh, come now," his father said. "It isn't that bad. Maybe you and Jerry can use all that spare time to sharpen up your forward-passing combination."

Suddenly, the look of disappointment disappeared from Sandy's face. In an instant he was his old high-spirited self, and he all but shouted, "Dad! Dad! I've got it! Why can't Jerry and I go to Minnesota?"

"Minnesota! What on earth would you do there?"

"Oh, I don't know. Of course it isn't as romantic as Alaska and all that. But still—why, we could even ride cross-country in Old Faithful—you know, Jerry's jalopy. We've got enough money. And, maybe," he said, growing more excited, "maybe by the time we got there, you could find a job for us in the ore mines!"

"Son," John Steele said, "it's an idea."

"Sure, Dad—it isn't as though Jerry and I aren't strong enough to do a man's work."

"Well," his father said with a grin, "I don't know for sure if you can do a man's work, yet, son—but I do know you can put away a man's meal. And unless I miss my guess, that's fried chicken that I smell cooking in there. So let's go in and eat, and talk some more about this Minnesota business."

Jerry James was already behind the soda fountain in his father's drugstore when Sandy Steele came walking through the door. Sandy put on a long face as he moved around the counter and began winding a white apron around his own slender, hard-muscled waist.

"Hey, what's wrong, Sandy?" Jerry said. "To look at you, you'd think it was Poplar City that won this afternoon."

"Bad news, Jerry."

"What?"

"The Alaska trip's off."

"Oh, no!" Jerry groaned. "And after we saved all that money!" He slumped forward on the counter and propped his lean, lantern jaw into

his hands. Then he ran his hands back over his close-cropped inky-black hair and said, "I could tear it out by the handful! What happened, Sandy?"

"Dad's orders were changed," Sandy replied, carefully making his voice sound glum. Then, unable to contain himself any longer, he let out a whoop and whacked his chum soundly on the back. "But we're going to Minnesota instead!"

"Minnesota?"

"Sure thing! Dad says he's pretty sure he can get us jobs in the ore mines. Honest, Jerry, it'll be great! Maybe it's a chance we'd never get again . . . to go east I mean. The mines are right on the Great Lakes, you know. Who knows? We might even take a trip on the Great Lakes."

"Sa-ay," Jerry breathed, his dark eyes gleaming. "That would be something, wouldn't it? But how will we get there? I mean, would we have enough money for the train fare?"

"Don't be a chump, Jerry. Have you forgotten Old Faithful?"

Well, Jerry James had forgotten. But the instant he remembered it, his face lighted up with an expression of purest joy.

"What a trip!" he shouted. "Driving Old Faith-

ful all the way from California to Minnesota! Sleeping out at night under the stars! Boy, oh boy, Sandy, I can hardly wait until—"

"I can hardly wait any longer," an unfriendly voice cut in, and, turning around, both boys looked into the features of Stanley Peperdine March.

"Pepper!" Jerry exclaimed. "Have you been waiting here all this time?"

"I have," Pepper March said coldly. "I was wondering if you two brave explorers were ever going to stop telling each other fairy stories."

"I guess we were kind of charged up," Jerry said sheepishly. "What'll you have, Pepper?"

"A Coke, please. And please remember not to put cracked ice in it."

"Why no ice, Pepper?"

"It makes my teeth chatter," Pepper said, and then, hearing Jerry snicker, he flushed darkly and turned to Sandy to sneer, "So your old man's going to Minnesota?"

"Do you mean my father?" Sandy said, with a quiet note of warning in his voice.

Sandy's reply flustered Pepper March. He turned away to sip his drink, pretending not to have heard. Sandy studied his old rival. As usual,

Stanley Peperdine March was dressed in the height of fashion. When Pepper March was around, it was never hard to tell which boy came from the wealthiest family in Valley View. In fact, Pepper's people were among the richest in the state. And he rarely overlooked a chance to let the world know about it.

Sandy Steele moved down behind the counter a bit so as to look Pepper in the eye, and said, "As I said before, Pepper, did you mean my father?"

Pepper looked deliberately at the soda jerk's cap and white apron that Sandy wore and said, "It seems to me that you're getting kind of uppity for a hired hand."

Sandy felt himself flushing. He fought hard to keep control of himself, and he carefully avoided looking into Pepper's taunting eyes for fear of getting angrier. Then he felt Jerry's reassuring hand on his arm and heard him say, "Be careful, Pepper, I'm warning you."

"Oh, you two. Can't you take a little joke? Of course, I meant his father. What's the difference, anyway? Father, old man—"

"Careful!" Jerry snapped.

"Oh, all right. All I meant was that I was wondering if Sandy's old, uh, if Mr. Steele was going

to Minnesota to make ore testings. Is he?" Pepper rushed on eagerly, dropping his customary air of superiority.

"Nosy, aren't you?" Jerry grinned, but Sandy stopped him before he could make further sport of the nettled Pepper.

"Why do you want to know?" Sandy asked evenly.

Pepper shrugged. "Just curious, that's all." He finished his Coke and got off his stool with a jaunty air, and just then, Sandy Steele had a sudden inspiration.

"I know why you want to know!" he said triumphantly. "That's why you're going to South America with your father, isn't it? To inspect the South American ore fields!"

Pepper whirled in anger. "Think you're smart, don't you?" he snarled, and Sandy smiled and said, "*I* never said it, Pepper."

"Oh, yes, you do!" Pepper went on, furious by now. "But let me tell you, Mr. Goody-Goody, maybe we *are* going to South America to look for ore! And that's nobody's business but ours. And furthermore, my old man says that anybody who bothers with the Mesabi mines any more must be crazy! You hear that, Steele? So your old—" he stopped short at a warning glance from Sandy, before rac-

ing on—"so your father's going to Minnesota on a wild-goose chase. He isn't going to find anything but a lot of dirt! And while you two dopes are sweating away in a worked-out iron mine, I'll be sailing up the Orinoco River on my father's yacht."

He smirked, threw a dime on the counter, made a little mocking bow at the door, and went out.

For a moment, there was silence in the drugstore. Then Jerry James picked up Pepper's glass, rinsed it and dried it off and returned it to the shelf. With a wink, he turned to his friend and said, "That Pepper's sure a windbag, isn't he?"

Sandy shook his head. His face was sober.

"I wish it was just talk, Jerry," he said. "But I'm afraid it's true. Dad said tonight there was a possibility of just that very thing happening. And he said it would be a terrible thing for American industry if we had to start buying our iron ore in South America."

For another moment, Sandy Steele frowned. He pushed his cowlick back from his eyes and struck the counter top with the flat of his hand. "Boy," he said grimly, "now I've got another good reason for hoping that Dad finds what he's looking for in Minnesota!"

CHAPTER TWO

The Long Boats

TWO WEEKS LATER, Old Faithful chugged away from the curb in front of the Steele home with the farewells of Sandy's mother ringing in the ears of both boys.

"Goodbye, Sandy; goodbye, Jerry," she had cried, waving one hand with a gaiety that was at odds with the tears forming in her eyes. "Be good boys, both of you. And please be careful! Give my love to your father, Sandy."

"Okay, Mom," Sandy had shouted back. "And tell Aunt Netty I'll send her a postcard."

Mrs. Steele had nodded and brushed a hand across her eyes. Then she waved again. For fully another minute, she stood on the porch steps watching until the freshly painted jalopy piled

high with luggage and other belongings at last disappeared around a corner. Then, with a sigh, she went inside to begin packing for her own visit to a widowed sister who lived in northern California.

In the front seat of Old Faithful, meanwhile, there was anything but tears. Both boys wore wide grins on their faces as they rolled down the main street in Valley View, waving and calling cheerfully to friends that they passed. As they neared the bus terminal, they saw Quiz Taylor herding a group of boys into a big station wagon.

"So long, Quiz," Sandy called. "See you in September."

Quiz Taylor looked up and his round, bespectacled face broke into an affectionate grin. "So long, boys," he yelled. "Hope you have an ore-full time."

Both Jerry and Sandy made wry faces at Quiz's terrible pun, but then they burst into good-natured laughter and waved again to their stubby friend as Old Faithful sped on down the street.

"He's something, that Quiz," Jerry said.

"He sure is," Sandy said. "I kind of wish he were coming along."

"Well," Jerry said slowly, spinning the wheel to make the turn that would take them through the

higher part of town lying between them and the highway, "Quiz would be okay if we were going to write a history about ore mines. But *working* in one? No sirree!"

"I guess you're right, Jerry. Give Quiz a week up there and he'd have the whole history of mining memorized, backward and for—"

"Oh, ho," Jerry said, interrupting. "Do you see what I see?"

Sandy leaned forward. They were passing along Ridge Road, the finest street in town. A hundred yards ahead of them, in front of the March mansion, a big black Cadillac limousine was drawn up to the curb. A uniformed chauffeur held the rear door open while Mr. March got in. Standing on the curb, awaiting his turn, was Stanley Peperdine March.

"Shall we wave to the stinker?" Jerry asked with a grin.

"Might as well," Sandy said. "No sense in holding a grudge."

"Okay," Jerry said, and as Old Faithful came abreast of the shining, expensive March car, he tooted the horn gaily and called out, "Hi-ya, Pepper, old sport."

"Hi, Pepper," Sandy yelled, and lifted his hand

to wave. But Pepper March had looked up and stiffened when he heard Jerry's voice. He stared straight at them both with open dislike, and then, as Sandy Steele raised his hand in greeting, Pepper March raised his to his nose and wiggled his fingers at both of them!

There was a silence in the front seat of Old Faithful. At last, it was broken by Jerry James, saying in disgust, "See what I mean, Sandy? You're too nice to that stinker."

"Oh, well," Sandy said. "At least we can look forward to a whole summer without Pepper."

Then Jerry slipped his jalopy into second gear as they descended the steep ramp leading down to the highway. In a moment, they had reached the broad cement strip and Jerry carefully forced the speedometer up to a point a few miles below the limit. Then he let out a long exultant yell. "Only two thousand miles to go, Sandy!" he shouted above the roar of Old Faithful's motor.

"Yep," Sandy said. "Minnesota, here we come!"

What a trip it was, from inland California east and north to the shores of Lake Superior! The boys alternated at the wheel during those glorious five days. They averaged 400 miles a day. For the first

time, they got a notion of the grandeur of their country, as Old Faithful whined patiently up the terrific grades of the Rocky Mountains and the boys could see the gigantic peaks rearing grandly in the air.

Then they were rushing down again into the valley of the Great Salt Lake in Utah and through the clean, neat streets of Salt Lake City. After climbing again into Wyoming, they drove across the Bad Lands of South Dakota into Minnesota. It was wonderful, indeed, driving by day, frequently pausing to take in the sights, and sleeping out under the stars.

One night they chose a farmer's field to spread their sleeping bags in. In the morning, Sandy awoke suddenly. He had dreamed that his mother had come into his bedroom and was smothering him with kisses. "Aw, Mom," he protested, "cut the kissing." When he opened his eyes, he saw that he was really being kissed—by a big brown cow who was busily licking his face.

"I guess the cow didn't like your sleeping on the best eating-grass," Jerry laughed as they ran from the field and jumped back into Old Faithful.

That was on the morning of the last day, and by that afternoon, they had driven through Duluth

and finally come to the Lake Superior port of Two Harbors—not far from the Mesabi pits inland.

When the two of them got their first glimpse of the lake they couldn't believe their eyes.

"It's as big as the ocean," Sandy said in amazement.

"You can't even see the sides, let alone the other end," Jerry said. "It sure is different seeing a thing than reading about it in school."

But they *really* boggled when they saw the enormous ore docks built out into the water, with the famous "long boats" of the Great Lakes nestled beneath them. The size of the equipment for loading the boats with precious ore was truly unbelievable.

"They're like skyscrapers lying on their sides," Sandy said. "Look, look, Jerry! See all those railroad cars up on top of the docks. There must be hundreds of them."

"Railroad cars! Is that what they are? They look like Tootsie Toys from here."

"Yes, but how about those ore boats? I never saw ships so long. Look at that big one over there, will you, Jerry? It must be twice as long as a football field."

Although Sandy was not aware of it, he had

come pretty close to hitting a bull's-eye. Some of the ships, or boats as they call the Great Lakes vessels, actually were 600 feet and more in length, and a football field, as Sandy well knew, is only 300 feet long. Just then, the boys heard a terrific clanking and clanging above them. Looking up, they saw a gigantic crane seize a railroad car as though it truly were a toy, turn it over in the air and let the ore run out of it—like a boy shaking sand from his shoes. The ore dropped down through chutes into the holds of the freighters below.

For a full minute, neither youth could speak. They were too filled with admiration for the vast industry their country had created on the shores of the inland seas, and too full of pride in the achievement.

Then Sandy said, "We'd better go find my father before it gets too dark."

Jerry nodded and they climbed back into Old Faithful and drove on. At last, when they came to what appeared to be a series of hills filled with puffing and panting steam shovels occupied in slicing deep cuts into the hillside, Jerry stopped the car in front of a sign that said:

LAKE ORE MINES, INC.

"That's it!" Sandy exclaimed. "That's where Dad's doing his testing. Lake Ore Mines. Come on, Jerry, drive through the gate."

"But, Sandy," Jerry said in disbelief. "These can't be mines. I don't see any mine shafts."

Sandy grinned. "If you'd paid more attention to Mr. Wilson instead of diagraming football plays you'd know that the Mesabi doesn't have shafts. There's so much ore on top of the ground here that they don't need them. They just skim it off with steam shovels. Strip mining, they call it."

With a sheepish shrug of his broad shoulders, Jerry James let out the clutch and Old Faithful leaped ahead. They drove along a bumpy dirt road, raising clouds of dust. They went for about a mile across a maze of railroad tracks over which the ore cars passed, before they reached a rough wooden shack.

The front door opened and a short, strongly built man stepped out. He had the rolling gait of a sea captain, and from this and the nautical, visored cap that he wore, Sandy guessed that he was a skipper of one of the ore boats. The man stopped and looked at them, and both boys saw that he had a small, flat nose, little brown, close-set eyes and thin, tight lips. He needed a shave, too.

"Pardon me, sir," Sandy said politely. "But can

you direct us to the Government Geologist's station?"

The man paused and gave them a searching look before he answered. "Back there," he said, jerking his finger over his shoulder—and walked away.

Jerry and Sandy exchanged glances. Then the shack door opened again. This time, John Steele stepped out—trim and youthful-looking in his leggings and whipcord breeches and open-necked shirt and wearing the campaign hat he'd saved from his days in the U.S. Marines.

"Dad!" Sandy shouted, overjoyed. He almost knocked his friend down in his haste to greet his father.

"Well, well," John Steele said. "If it isn't the adventure twins from Valley View, California. How are you, son?" he said, grasping Sandy's hand. Then he gave Jerry a hearty whack on the arm. "Glad to see you again, Jerry. How was the trip out?"

"Great, sir!" Jerry said with enthusiasm. "I'll never forget it."

"That's the ticket. Do these things while you're young, boys. Sort of gives you a cushion of memories for your old age."

John Steele's face went grave.

"You didn't get my telegram, did you, Sandy?"

"Telegram, sir?"

"I see you didn't. Well, boys, buck up—there's another dose of bad news coming. I'm afraid I won't be able to get jobs for you."

"No jobs!" the two youths chorused disbelievingly.

"That's right. This low-grade ore situation has gotten so bad that . . . well, to make a long story short, boys, there's not as much work around here as there used to be. And that means jobs only for those who really need them."

Sandy and Jerry stood as though thunderstruck. They felt as though their world had suddenly caved in on them. Neither of them knew what to say, but both felt the same weary, sinking feeling in their stomachs. For a long second, Sandy Steele stared at his father. It had been on the tip of his tongue to argue with him, to say that they could do the job as well as any grown man. But Sandy knew better.

He knew that his father would be angered by any such suggestion. He would remind Sandy that most of the men in the mines were family men with responsibilities. No, Sandy thought, this is just another one of those times where I've got to "take it on the chin," as Dad says.

Taking it on the chin was sort of a Steele family motto. John Steele had no use for whiners or whimperers, boys who complained that their coach didn't like them or their teacher was unfair. He had always taught his son to be dogged. "It's the dogged men who get things done, Sandy," he would say. "Even if most of the world's applause often goes to the flash-in-the-pan."

Remembering this, Sandy lifted his chin and tried to grin. "What do we do now, Dad," he said, "punt?"

Mr. Steele smiled. "That's the spirit, son," he said. "Now, listen. The sun will come up tomorrow just as it always does and by then you may be over this little disappointment. So supposing you two walk around the mines a bit while I finish my work, and then we can have dinner and talk things over."

"Okay, Dad," Sandy said.

"Sure thing, Mr. Steele," said Jerry.

Trying to hold their heads higher than they felt like holding them, the two boys turned and strolled off toward the lake shore. As they walked, they hardly heard the rattle-and-bang of the steam shovels digging ever deeper into the hillsides. Nor were they very much aware of the railroad cars that would receive the ore and then go clattering

out on the ore docks to fill the holds of the ships. They were too deeply plunged into gloomy thoughts of the long, dull summer that lay ahead of them back home in Valley View.

CHAPTER THREE

Bull's-Eye

SUDDENLY, Sandy Steele stiffened. He grabbed his chum by the arm and pointed in horror toward the lake.

There, not a hundred feet away, an elderly, white-haired, finely dressed gentleman stood gazing at one of the loading boats. He was absolutely unaware of the certain death that traveled toward him in the shape of a wildly swinging ore bucket.

"Down!" Sandy shouted. "Down, sir!"

The old man did not hear him. There was too much clamor about him.

Sandy and Jerry both dug their toes into the hard surface of the ground beneath them—like track sprinters ready to go off their mark. But the

man was too far away. They could not have covered twenty feet before that horrible bucket would have done its awful work. With dreadful speed, the huge bucket—weighing two tons or more—was swinging closer, ever closer. And still the old man was unconscious of the fact that perhaps only a few seconds lay between his life and his death.

With a cry of despair, Sandy Steele sought to tear his eyes away. But he could not. Sandy was not that sort of youth. In anguish, his eyes roved the surrounding area—hunting for some means to save the old man's life. Then they fell upon a chunk of ore. It was just a trifle bigger than a baseball.

Without a second's delay, Sandy Steele pounced upon the piece of ore. He grasped it with his two-fingered, pitcher's grip and whirled and threw with all his might. Every ounce of strength in Sandy Steele's lanky, cablelike muscles went into that throw. The ore left his hand and whizzed toward the big bucket with all the speed that had had the Poplar City batters eating out of Sandy's hand only a few weeks ago.

CLANG!

The ore struck the bucket with a resounding, echoing ring!

Instantly, the old man's head turned.

He saw death but a few feet from his head.

In the next instant, he dropped to the ground and the bucket passed harmlessly above him.

"Are you all right, sir?" Sandy Steele cried.

Both Sandy and Jerry had charged up to the old man's assistance immediately after Sandy had made his splendid throw. Now, they helped him regain his feet.

"Why, I guess I *am* all right, boys," the man said, giving just the smallest shudder as he dusted himself off. "But one more second, and I guess I *wouldn't* be." He looked sharply at Sandy.

"Was it you who threw that rock?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, son, it must have been a great throw. Worthy of old Christy Mathewson himself. But better than that, boy, you saved my life. And I'm much obliged." He held out his hand. "What's your name, son?"

"Steele, sir. Sandy Steele. This is my friend Jerry James."

"Pleased to meet you, boys. My name is John Kennedy." He adjusted his coat lapels and turned to look out at the loading docks again. "See that boat out there? That's one of mine. The *James Kennedy*. Named after my father, boys. He

founded the family shipping line." A shadow passed over the man's normally ruddy and pleasant features. "I guess I was too busy watching the *James Kennedy* loading to notice that confounded bucket was getting set to whack my head off."

Mr. Kennedy shot them a sly look. "Like to go aboard her?"

"Would we!"

"I'll say!"

Smiling, Mr. Kennedy led the way toward the long narrow ore freighter. Loading operations had been completed by the time they reached the dock, so they were allowed to proceed with little danger. They walked in awe beneath the now silent ore chutes, conscious as never before of their great size. Then, when they had come abreast of the *James Kennedy*'s wheelhouse and superstructure in the after part of the ship, their host said genially, "All right now, boys—hop to it. Down the ramp there and wait for me."

As Sandy's feet struck the slightly grimy steel deck, he noticed that the crewmen were busily covering up the load of ore that had just been deposited in the vessel's holds. For a moment, he watched them. Then he gave a start.

The man who was directing them was the same short, powerfully built man that they had seen

coming out of John Steele's field-testing shack a little earlier.

"Oh, ho," said Mr. Kennedy, observing Sandy's gesture. "So you know Captain West, eh?"

"Not exactly, sir. But I do remember seeing him coming out of my father's field station only a few minutes ago."

"Your father's field sta—" Mr. Kennedy struck his hands together sharply. "Why, of course! How could I have missed the resemblance! You're John Steele's son, aren't you?" Sandy nodded proudly, and Mr. Kennedy rambled on, beaming: "Nothing like having your life saved by your friend's son. Sort of keeps it in the family. And I certainly must tell John Steele what a fine boy he has! Ah, that's it—down that ladder there. Smells like we're just in time, boys."

Still chuckling, Mr. Kennedy gingerly followed Sandy and Jerry as they clambered down a narrow, steep, iron stairway that led into a cabin fitted with a long table having benches on either side. A few of the crewmen in faded blue shirts and dungarees were already seated, eating. They smiled at the two youths.

"This is the galley, boys," Mr. Kennedy said. "Ah, here's Cookie."

Sandy and Jerry burst out laughing as the little

man shuffled into the galley, and then, seeing them, threw up his hands in mock horror and made a dive as though to save the platters of food on the table from destruction.

"S.O.S.," he wailed, "S.O.S. Save Our Suppers!"

"All right, Cookie," Mr. Kennedy chuckled. "That'll be enough. How about rustling up a feed for my two young friends? This lad here," he started to say, looking at Sandy. But then, seeing Sandy blush, he went on: "This lad here has just done the Kennedy Shipping Line a great favor. Show him how we treat our friends, Cookie."

"Aye, aye, sir," Cookie said, bobbing his bald head and grinning. He shuffled off, and when he returned, he almost staggered under the burden of the platter he held. Boy, Sandy and Jerry thought, eying the platter hungrily, Mr. Kennedy sure does treat his friends well!

There were thick, juicy steaks and plates of French fried potatoes, pitchers of cold milk and plates of hot rolls and hard, cold butter—and, after dinner, two kinds of pie and plenty of ice cream.

"Boy, oh, boy," Jerry James said weakly, after he had at last put down his fork. "I'd say that meal was worth the drive from California—even if we didn't get jobs in the mines."

"Jobs?" Mr. Kennedy said. "Mines?"

"Yes, sir," Sandy put in. "You see, Dad thought that he'd be able to land us summer jobs. That's why Jerry and I drove all the way from Valley View, where we live. But when we got here, Dad told us that work was so slow in the mines there just weren't any jobs."

As he spoke, Sandy's good spirits began to drop a little. So did Jerry's. For the moment, in the excitement of the events following the incident with the ore bucket, they had forgotten all about their disappointment. But now they realized once more that they were stranded 2,000 miles from home, without a job and just enough money to take them right back where they'd started from.

Mr. Kennedy looked at them soberly. "That *is* too bad," he said. "But what your father says about the mines is true, Sandy." He frowned. "How I wish it were not! Listen, boys, and I'll let you in on a little business secret." They leaned toward him, and Mr. Kennedy went on. "This boat, the *James Kennedy,* is making one of my firm's last runs down the lakes to Buffalo." He shook his head. "There's just nothing to be done about this low-grade-ore situation, and I've decided to sell the shipping line." He grimaced. "In fact, I'm selling out to my worst competitor, not the sort of

fellow I'd like to sit down to dinner with, boys. But he's made me an offer, and I'm taking it.

"That's business, boys. So, you young fellows have the rather doubtful honor of sitting in the galley of the last of the Kennedy boats to—"

Mr. Kennedy's mouth came open and he brought his clenched hand down on the table with a crash that startled Sandy and Jerry.

"Why not?" he said, smiling at them.

"Why not what, sir?" Sandy asked in polite puzzlement.

"Why not sign on a pair of young huskies from California as a sort of small reward for saving this leathery old skin of mine—that's what!"

Sandy Steele drew a sharp breath of joy and Jerry James had to keep from jumping on the mess table to dance a jig.

"You don't mean it, sir!" Sandy gasped.

"Certainly, I mean it. Why, wouldn't you boys rather see the Great Lakes from the decks of a long boat than from the bottom of some dusty old ore digging?"

"Would we!" Jerry shouted. "Just ask us, that's all—just ask us!"

"I already have," Mr. Kennedy said, chuckling. He was obviously enjoying the sensation his offer had created.

"Well, then, we accept," Sandy Steele said quickly. "When do we start?"

"You can come aboard tonight, if you like. In fact, you probably should. The *James Kennedy* is shoving off in the morning. You'd better not take any chances on missing her."

"Right," Sandy said, grinning in delight at his friend Jerry. Then, his face fell and he exclaimed, "Dad! We promised Dad we'd have dinner with him!"

Mr. Kennedy glanced at his watch. "Why, it's only six o'clock," he said. "If I know John Steele, he'll be working well past that." Looking up, he said, "Don't tell me two deck hands like yourselves are going to object to eating a second dinner?"

Jerry James grinned sheepishly. "Well, sir, if you put it that way—I guess not. In fact," he said, rubbing his stomach gently, "I'm not quite as full as I thought I was."

"I thought so," Mr. Kennedy said, getting to his feet and leading the way out of the galley. "Now," he continued, puffing at the exertion of climbing the ladder topside, "you boys had better get your things together and report back here to Captain West. He'll be notified that you're ship-

ping aboard. Captain West's one of the finest skippers on the Kennedy Line."

They walked together to the lake shore. At the end of the dock, Sandy could see a handsome, well-kept limousine—not flashy and loaded with chrome, like Pepper March's.

"I'm driving back to Buffalo, boys," Mr. Kennedy told them. "Getting too old to weather those Great Lakes storms, I guess. I've sailed the Kennedy boats since I was fifteen, but now . . ." His voice trailed off and his kindly face saddened. "Well, now, I guess things are changing. The Kennedy boats will soon be the Chadwick boats. By the time I get home, I suppose Paul Chadwick will have the whole deal drawn up and waiting for my signature."

He held out his hand. "Goodbye, boys. Have a happy voyage—and remember to give your father my best, Sandy." He turned and walked slowly to the car and the chauffeur who held a rear door open for him. He was a mournful figure as he got in the back and drove off in silence.

Sandy and Jerry waved as the car departed, and then Sandy said through clenched teeth, "Oh, how I hope Dad can locate some high-grade ore deposits!"

"Me, too!" Jerry James exclaimed. "I'd hate to see a fine old gentleman like Mr. Kennedy forced to sell his shipping line."

"And to someone he doesn't trust!" Sandy added, his face serious and his voice grim. "Come on, Jerry, we'd better hurry if we want to get to Dad's place before dark."

CHAPTER FOUR

A Plot Discovered

"Now, supposing I tell you my good news?"

The speaker was John Steele. He asked his question as he and Sandy and Jerry carried their loaded trays from the cafeteria-style mess hall to their table on a terrace outdoors overlooking the lake.

Ever since the two youths had rejoined Sandy's father—almost bumping into Captain West as he came out of the field shack for the second time that day—they had been eagerly recounting their good fortune. Sandy's father had been delighted to hear that his old friend John Kennedy had signed on his son and Jerry for the Duluth-to-Buffalo run. At one point, when he asked Sandy how they had met Mr. Kennedy, Sandy flushed and looked away.

Jerry James had proudly jumped into the breach. "Sandy saved Mr. Kennedy's life, Mr. Steele," Jerry had said.

Then, of course, nothing would do but that Jerry should relate the entire episode while John Steele listened with shining eyes. At last, Mr. Steele had proposed dinner. Now, as he said, "Supposing I tell you my good news?" Sandy was glad to have someone change the subject.

"Sure, Dad," he said. "Fire away."

John Steele drew a deep breath. "I've discovered some high-grade ore deposits," he said.

For the second time that day, Sandy and Jerry felt a wild thrill of joy. For a day that had started out so badly, things were indeed looking up!

"Wonderful, Dad, wonderful! Where?"

"Not too far from Lake Superior. Of course, they'll have to run the railroad spur a bit farther inland, but that's really no problem." John Steele's voice took on a note of pride. "Matter of fact, these deposits are rather rich. Sixty per cent iron content, I'd say—maybe even more."

"What a day, huh, Jerry? Just think, this means that Mr. Kennedy may not have to sell his lake boats, after all."

"That's right, son. If this vein is as rich as I

think it is, he may even have to build a few more boats—to take care of the load."

Sandy Steele's eyes sparkled with excitement. "Dad," he burst out, "I've got a great idea!"

"What's that, Sandy?"

"Where can I get in touch with Mr. Kennedy? He was leaving for Buffalo."

"Why, I would say he's heading for Minneapolis first. He won't be there until quite late. Why, Sandy—what do you have in mind?"

"I'm going to put in a long-distance call and tell him the good news! After all, he's been pretty good to Jerry and me. This is the least we can do for him."

"I'd say you've been pretty helpful already, Sandy," Mr. Steele drawled. Then, smiling, he went on, "But you don't need to worry. That's all been taken care of. Captain West has been informed, and he will tell Mr. Kennedy."

"Oh," Sandy said, a note of doubt mingling with the disappointment in his voice.

"Sandy!" John Steele's voice was sharp. "What did you mean by that 'Oh'? You make it sound as though Captain West is not to be trusted."

"Oh, no, sir," Sandy rushed on, embarrassed. "Nothing of the kind. I don't even know him,

Dad—except by sight. And I've heard Mr. Kennedy himself say that Captain West was a very fine skipper."

"He is that," Sandy's father said, relaxing. "I guess I misunderstood you, son."

"Anyway," Jerry James put in, "it will all be in the newspapers, won't it, Mr. Steele?"

"Not exactly, Jerry. You see, these things take weeks, even after you've made your initial discovery. Not that I'm not certain of these deposits. Far from it! I've never been more so. But there is always a certain amount of time before a report is properly nailed down—firmly enough for the newspapers to print it, that is."

"But what you've discovered today, Dad—that's enough to make Mr. Kennedy change his mind about selling?"

"It certainly is!"

"Good," Sandy said. Then, laying down his knife and fork, he leaned back in his chair with a sigh. He brushed back his cowlick and looked sorrowfully at the slice of roast beef remaining on his plate.

"Honestly," he said, "I don't think I've got room for another single ounce."

"Well, well," Jerry James said, apologetically, as he reached over and speared the morsel with his

fork. "I think that I just might be able to handle it."

The unbelievably long silhouette of the *James Kennedy* lay long and dark like a great sea serpent against the looming bulk of the ore dock as Sandy Steele and Jerry James returned to the lake shore. They carried suitcases in which they had hurriedly stuffed the few things they'd be needing for shipboard life. Each had put in soap and comb and toothpaste and toothbrushes and two sets of dungarees for working hours, plus a good pair of slacks and a sport shirt for those days when they hoped to go ashore in Great Lakes ports like Detroit or Cleveland.

They had disposed of Old Faithful easily enough. Sandy's father had been pleased to take charge of Jerry's jalopy while they were gone. It was just what he needed for the short trips between his field shack and the ore borings.

As the two friends walked up the *James Kennedy*'s ramp, their feet were dragging just a trifle. They had had a long and eventful day, and they were tired. When they stepped on deck, Jerry lost his balance and stumbled. Sandy had to shoot out an arm to keep him from falling. Suddenly, out of the dark, a voice growled, "Late, ain'cha?"

Sandy stopped dead, his hand still grasping Jerry's arm. He heard a low snicker, and then the voice said, "Jumpy, too, ain'cha?"

"Well, no," Sandy Steele said slowly, his eyes searching the darkness. "Where are you?"

"Over here."

As their eyes became accustomed to the darkness, the two youths made out the figure of a tall man seated on a canvas chair. He leaned back against the bulkhead and stared at them from unfriendly eyes.

"I guess you two are Ma Kennedy's little chicks," he sneered. "That right?"

Sandy Steele felt a quick rush of anger. But he controlled himself and said, "We're the men Mr. Kennedy signed on, if that's what you mean."

"Men!" The tall man slapped his feet on the deck and cackled. " 'Men,' he says! Ain't that a hot one?" He glared at them. "Which one of you's named Steele?"

"I am," Sandy said.

"Go down below and report to the skipper. He's waiting for you. First deck down, first cabin to starboard."

"To starboard?" Sandy repeated, and then, remembering that he was aboard ship, he blushed in the dark. The tall man's cackle of derision didn't

help his self-control any. But Sandy resolved to ignore the man. With a reassuring squeeze of Jerry's arm, he left his friend and clambered below.

Going down the ladder, Sandy Steele hoped the unfriendly tall man would not make Jerry a target for his ridicule. Jerry James was good-natured enough, but he did have a hair-trigger temper.

When Sandy reached Captain West's cabin, he stopped and knocked.

"Come in," a gruff voice called, and Sandy pulled the heavy bulkhead open and stepped inside a small, dimly lighted room. Captain West was seated at a desk. He had his back to the door, but he swung around when Sandy entered. Sandy noticed that he still hadn't shaved. Apparently he had been writing a letter, for he laid down a fountain pen with the air of a man who has been interrupted.

"Who are you?" Captain West growled, even though Sandy was sure that he had recognized him.

"Sandy Steele is my name, sir."

"Oh, you're one of the two kids old man Kennedy—" Captain West stopped and ran a thick stubby hand across his lips. "How well do you know Kennedy?" he snapped.

Sandy was taken aback. "I don't understand you, sir."

"Don't play dumb with me, Steele. You know what I mean. Are you a relative of his, or something? A nephew, maybe?"

"No, sir. I met him today for the first time."

Captain West showed his disbelief. His thin lips parted and he started to laugh. It wasn't a friendly laugh. Listening to it made Sandy feel anything but good-humored.

"C'mon, kid." Captain West stared. "Let's have the truth. What's your connection with Old Man Kennedy?"

Sandy Steele was furious inwardly. He hadn't liked the way the tall man topside had referred to Mr. Kennedy, but to hear Captain West—the valued skipper of the Kennedy Shipping Line—going on in the same disrespectful tone, well, that was going too far.

"I *am* telling the truth, Captain," Sandy said coldly. "I only met *Mr.* Kennedy today, and that was by accident." Captain West raised his thick, dark eyebrows quizzically, and Sandy, with great reluctance, launched into the tale of the ore bucket.

When he had finished, he found, to his amaze-

ment, that Captain West was regarding him with what could only be disgust!

"So *that's* the answer," Captain West muttered. With a sort of displeasure, he swung around and began writing again.

"All right, Steele," he said over his shoulder. "Mr. Briggs will show you and the other boy to your quarters. And you can report to Cookie in the morning."

"Cookie!"

Sandy Steele couldn't believe his ears. Before he could stop himself, he had taken two quick steps around to the side of Captain West's desk. With swift, reddening anger, Captain West threw down his fountain pen and slapped two hairy paws over the letter he'd been writing.

"Are you insubordinate already?" he shouted. "Who do you think you are, questioning a skipper's orders like that? D'ya think I'm going to let a pair of punk kids the likes of you work topside where the men are? Not on your life! You'll report to the galley where you belong, and leave the men's work to the men. Now, get out of my sight!"

Sandy Steele felt himself going hot and cold by turns. He clenched and unclenched his fists as he stood there, looking down into the little piggish

eyes of Captain West. They seemed to gleam wickedly in the reflected light of the desk lamp. Finally, with a low, mumbled "Aye, aye, sir," Sandy Steele turned slowly around and left.

Abovedeck, he found Mr. Briggs. Apparently, he had not bothered to make game of Jerry, for the two of them stood against the rail gazing out at the moon that had just begun to rise over Lake Superior. In the light of the moonlight shimmering on the water, Mr. Briggs got a look at Sandy's whitened face.

"Ho, ho," he cackled. "Skipper gave you the rough side of his tongue, eh? Well, you'll get used to it. Here, let me show you two below."

They went down, down and down, to the lowest hold, and as they descended the ladder, Sandy Steele wondered to himself if he could ever possibly get used to an insulting man like Captain West. He was thinking the same thing as he and Jerry tumbled wearily into the bunks which occupied almost all the space in their tiny cabin. Jerry slept below, and Sandy above.

The more Sandy thought of Captain West, the more convinced he became that he and Jerry should leave the ship before the *James Kennedy* cast off her moorings and got under way. But, no, he thought again, that would be too much like

quitting. Still, what were they to do? For some unexplained reason, Captain West despised them and was determined to make their voyage as unpleasant as he could. But why? Sandy could not understand it. He forced his tired brain to go over all the events of the day. He could recall seeing Captain West twice at his father's field station. Then, he had seen him again when Mr. Kennedy brought them aboard ship. Apart from that, he had never seen the man before.

Suddenly, in a tiny corner of Sandy Steele's brain, a light flashed. Astounded, unable to believe what he remembered seeing, Sandy shot erect. His head struck the overhead a painful blow, and below him Jerry James sputtered out of a sound sleep.

"Sandy! Sandy, what happened?"

"I just hit my head, but never mind that, Jerry," Sandy whispered. "Listen, remember when Mr. Kennedy was saying so sadly that the Kennedy boats would have another name soon?"

"Yes?"

"Can you remember the other name?"

"Sure. It was Chadwick. He said he was completing a deal with Paul Chadwick."

Jerry James heard a sharp hiss above him, and then the rustling of bedclothes. Then, to his sur-

prise, a pair of long, lean-muscled legs dropped down in front of his eyes. In the next instant, Sandy Steele was crouching in his underwear alongside Jerry's bunk, whispering excitedly.

"Chadwick! That's it! Listen, Jerry, when I came in to Captain West's cabin tonight, I interrupted him as he was writing a letter. I didn't mean to see who it was addressed to, but I did." Sandy paused dramatically. "It was addressed to Mr. Paul Chadwick!"

For a long second, there was a silence in the little cabin, a silence broken only by the heavy breathing of the two youths. Then, as Jerry James scrambled quickly from his bunk, Sandy whispered, "We've got to get out of here and warn Mr. Kennedy, Jerry. I'm positive that Captain West is working for the Chadwick shipping interests, and against Mr. Kennedy. He'll never tell Mr. Kennedy about the deposits Dad discovered! And Mr. Kennedy will go right ahead and sell his boats for practically nothing!"

"You're right, Sandy," Jerry whispered, hastily pulling on his dungaree pants. "Good thing you found out about Captain West before it was too late. Our ship doesn't sail until to—"

Jerry James cut short his sentence with a groan. In their mad rush to get dressed, Sandy and

Jerry had not noticed the steady shuddering of the *James Kennedy*'s sides. They had paid no heed to the regular throbbing of her motors.

The *James Kennedy* had put out on Lake Superior ten minutes ago.

CHAPTER FIVE

A New Friend

IN THE MORNING, there was no time to make further plans, as the two friends had promised each other before they finally dropped off to sleep. They were awakened by the sound of Cookie's voice as the little man leaned in the door of their cabin and cried, "Up and at 'em, boys, up and at 'em! It's five o'clock, and that's the time to rise and shine!"

Still sleepy-eyed, Sandy and Jerry tumbled out of their bunks and stood looking at Cookie with blank expressions on their faces. Cookie returned their stare with a toothless grin.

"Don't rightly know where you are, hey, boys? Well, you're aboard the *James Kennedy* and right now we're out in the middle of Lake Superior."

He cocked a twinkling eye at them and flashed another one of his smiles, and the youths were heartened to find someone, at least, who seemed to want to be friendly with them.

"Go ahead and wash up," Cookie said. "Be in the galley in fifteen minutes and I'll have your breakfasts ready. In fact, you might just have the time to go topside and see the sun come up."

Then he was gone.

Sandy and Jerry obediently headed for the washroom. There, they sloshed cold water on their faces and brushed their teeth. That made them feel better. By the time they had grasped the handrail of the ladder leading abovedeck, they had recovered their normal high spirits.

"Shucks," Jerry said. "I don't see what we got so riled up about last night. We'll be in Buffalo in plenty of time to warn Mr. Kennedy."

"You're right, Jerry," Sandy said. "That's what I was thinking, too. Funny how you forget that a boat can make good time because it's moving in a straight line. Driving in an automobile, Mr. Kennedy will have to go through six or seven states."

"Sure. And don't forget that a boat keeps moving all the time, like a railroad train. In a car, you have to stop to get some sleep or eat."

It was still dark as they came out on deck. Far out in front of them, they could see the bulk of the forward superstructure—the navigation bridge and the deck gang's quarters—rearing out of the black. Beneath their feet they felt the steady throbbing of the *James Kennedy*'s engines. All around them, for miles and miles, stretched the flat, black surface of Lake Superior. Ahead of them, for they were sailing due east, there was a light rosy glow that heralded the rising of the sun. Even then, as they looked, a line of horizon was beginning to take shape.

"Isn't it something?" Sandy whispered. "Here we are, thousands of miles inland. Yet, it's just like sailing on an ocean." Sandy Steele stretched his neck and stood on his tiptoes and turned slowly around. "You can't see anything but water," he said.

"Boy, what a country!" Jerry James breathed.

The two youths fell silent. Carefully, they looked away from each other, for neither one wished to betray the strong emotions that held him at that moment. Their feelings were a mixture of pride and love of country and a certain awe in the presence of its beauty and grandeur.

"Hey," Jerry said, suddenly breaking the spell. "What's that light out there?"

He pointed and Sandy Steele's eyes followed his finger.

"I'll bet it's another lake boat," Sandy said. "Sure! That's what it is. And there's another one. There must be a half dozen of them, Jerry."

Jerry James chuckled. "Say," he said, "this lake's a regular freeway, isn't it?"

Sandy nodded. "I think I hear Cookie calling us, Jerry," he said. "Let's go below."

On their way down, Sandy went on, "We'd better keep what we know about Captain West a secret. We'll wait until we get to Buffalo to telephone Mr. Kennedy. Of course, if we're delayed or a storm comes up, we'll have to think of something else. Who knows? Maybe we'll stop in Detroit or some other Great Lakes port, and we can call him from there."

"Right," Jerry said, and then, "Hey, do you smell what I smell?"

Sandy did, indeed, and the eyes of both of them went wide with wonder at the sight of the breakfast Cookie had set up for them on a tiny table at the end of his gleaming, spotless, aluminum galley.

"Eat hearty, boys," Cookie said, bobbing his bald head in the direction of the ham and eggs and stacks of toast and jars of jelly. "Plenty more where that came from."

"Boy," Jerry said, "do you always eat like this?"

"On the Kennedy boats, you do," Cookie said. "Of course, almost all of the lake boats feed good. But there ain't any to compare with the old white K Line." Cookie's face darkened. "Now, if you was aboard a Chadwicker, I don't think you'd be chowing down so good."

"How's that, Cookie?" Jerry said, squaring himself away to attack his fourth egg.

"Humph!" Cookie grunted, as he started to sharpen a long thin knife. After a series of expert, clashing strokes against the sharpening steel he held in his hand, he bent over a haunch of bacon on his board and began to slice it down. "Chadwick's the cheapest line on the lakes, that's why," he went on. "And I ought to know. Sailed on the Chadwickers for five years, I did. And not a night went by that I didn't have to count the eggs and hand the keys to the icebox over to the skipper."

Jerry chortled at the notion of a crestfallen Cookie locking up his beloved icebox for the night. "Boy," he said, forgetting himself, "that's one more reason why we've got to stop Mr. Kennedy from selling—"

Sandy Steele's foot moved swiftly under the table, and Jerry clutched his ankle with a surprised expression of pain on his face.

"Hey, that hurt!" he started to say, but then, remembering their secret, he flushed in embarrassment.

Cookie had whirled and was looking at them with an expression of bewilderment.

"Selling?" he repeated. "Did you say selling?"

"Oh, no," Jerry choked, his face getting redder and redder. "I said *sailing*. You see," he rushed on frantically, trying to think of a good story, "what I really meant was . . ."

Poor Jerry. He had begun to flounder, because he wasn't used to the strain of making up a good lie on the spur of the moment. But just then one of the crewmen came to his rescue.

"Hey, Cookie," he said irritably as he poked his head inside the galley. "When do we eat? I've been sitting out here for five minutes."

To the great relief of both Jerry and Sandy, Cookie instantly forgot his question and turned to covering his grill with sizzling slices of bacon and gently popping eggs.

"All right, boys," he said. "Turn to."

For the next hour or so, Sandy and Jerry flew back and forth between the mess hall and the galley, bringing the breakfasts of the crewmen and clearing the dirty dishes away. Then, when breakfast was over, Cookie set them to work wash-

ing the dishes. When this was done, Cookie opened a cupboard and took out a bucket and mop together with a long-handled, T-shaped instrument that looked something like a window washer's rubber blade.

"Know what this is, Jerry?" he said, grinning.

Jerry James shook his head.

"This here's what they call a squeegee. And she's going to be your sweetheart until we get to Buffalo."

Sandy laughed at the look of displeasure on his chum's face, as Cookie gave them a demonstration of how the squeegee is handled. First he filled the bucket with soapy water. This he sloshed over the deck in the mess hall. Then, with the motion of a man raking a lawn, he worked the squeegee across the deck. The rubbery blade made squeaking noises as it moved.

"That's how the squeegee got its name," Cookie said. "Hear it? Squee . . . gee . . . squee . . . gee . . ." He winked at Sandy. "Now, you, Sandy, you go over the deck with this mop after Jerry's finished. Do the same in the galley. And remember, you do this after every meal."

"Every meal!" Jerry exclaimed.

"That's right, boy. A ship's galley has to be as clean as a hospital. You've got men living aboard

ship in close quarters and you can't take any chances with dirt and germs. Now, turn to!"

They turned to.

And by the time they had gotten the mess hall and the galley sparkling again to Cookie's liking, it was time for lunch! They had to go through the same process again, and Jerry James moaned, "Honestly, Sandy, the water in this bucket is probably the only water we'll see until we get to Buffalo!"

But the second time they went through their round of chores, they moved with more speed because they were more practiced. By a little after four o'clock, they had finished. Cookie ran an approving eye over their handiwork, and said, "Good job, boys. What say we go topside and have a talk while I smoke my pipe?"

They were only too glad to agree.

Up above, they noticed that Captain West was standing at the starboard rail, talking to his mate, Mr. Briggs. The skipper scowled when he saw the boys. He spoke quickly to his mate, and Mr. Briggs hurried over to them. As he came up, Sandy saw that he did not look so fierce by daylight as he had seemed at night. In fact, his chin was a trifle weak and he had the worried air of a man who suffers from indigestion.

"You," Mr. Briggs said, aiming a dirty fingernail at Sandy. "Skipper wants you."

Sandy nodded and followed him to Captain West.

"Ain't I seen you and your friend somewheres before?" the captain asked.

Sandy nodded. He knew that he shouldn't have, but he couldn't help himself. He was not fond of Captain West.

The skipper's eyes flashed and his face reddened and his hand came up involuntarily. But he held it back, and snarled, "When I ask a question, I want it answered out loud! And when you talk to me, you say 'Sir.' Now, answer my question."

"Yes, sir," Sandy said evenly. "You saw us in front of my father's testing station."

"Your father's testing—" Captain West began to repeat, puzzled. But then his face cleared, and he said, "So that's it! Certainly, your name's Steele, too." Now, a look of cunning crept into his face. He softened his voice. "Young fellow, perhaps I was a bit hard on you last night. Step over here to the rail for a moment. I want to ask you a few questions."

Sandy followed him.

"Well, well, well," Captain West said, pretend-

ing to be jovial. "You certainly are a chip off the old block."

Sandy flushed, and the skipper mistook it for a sign of pleasure. Actually, Sandy was disgusted by the man's attempt to fool him.

"Now, my boy," Captain West went on. "When did you see your old, ahem, see your father last?"

"Just before we came aboard," Sandy said stiffly.

"Hmmm. Your father didn't, ah, that is to say, did your father say anything about—"

Sandy saw his chance and interrupted swiftly. "Excuse me, sir, if you mean did he mention you, the fact is that he did."

"Ah?"

"He said," Sandy told Captain West in all truthfulness, "he said that you were one of the Kennedy Line's finest skippers."

"Well, well," Captain West said, plainly pleased. "That was very kind of your father. Did he, ah, by the way, say anything about his work?"

"In what way, sir?" Sandy asked innocently.

For a moment, Captain West hemmed and hawed, but then, probably because he was satisfied that Sandy knew nothing of the important information which he was disloyally keeping from his employer, he dropped the question. He sent

Sandy back to Cookie and Jerry with the promise that if the two youths worked well enough in the galley, he would bring them topside for the return trip.

Jerry eyed Sandy questioningly upon his return, but Sandy merely shrugged and squatted alongside Cookie to listen to the old man talk.

"You see, boys," Cookie said, waving his pipe in the air, "we're within sight of land again. That shoreline way ahead, to either side, means that we're getting close to the Soo."

"The Soo?"

"Yup, the Sault Sainte Marie. They call it the Soo, though, probably because nobody but the Frenchies can pronounce it right. That's where Lake Superior empties into Lake Huron through the St. Mary's River. That's where the Soo Locks are, boys. If you're headed downlake, they float you down to a lower level. If you're headed uplake, they raise you up."

"Like the Panama Canal?" Sandy asked.

"Right. Now, you take us. We're going downlake. So, once we've entered Lake Huron from Lake Superior, we can keep on going down Huron and through the Detroit River into Lake Erie, past Detroit and Cleveland and on to Buffalo. Or else, we can sort of double back, head west, that is,

and sail through the Straits of Mackinac into Lake Michigan and hit Milwaukee and Chicago."

Both Sandy and Jerry shook their heads in wonder.

"You know, Cookie," Sandy said, "it's hard for us to get used to the idea of Chicago and Milwaukee and Detroit and Cleveland as port cities. We're from the West, and when we think of a port we think of San Francisco or Los Angeles. Or, if it's in the East, we think of Boston or New York."

"Well, that's only natural. You think of the ocean. But let me tell you, boys, some of these Great Lakes ports are among the biggest in the world! Ocean or no ocean."

Cookie removed his pipe from his mouth and pointed with the stem at the boat that railed the *James Kennedy* about a half mile to port. It was not quite half as long as the *Kennedy,* though it seemed to be about as wide. Its decks were loaded with railroad cars.

"See that?" Cookie said. "That's a car ferry. You won't see ships like that hardly anywhere else in the world. It's even a bit out of place on Lake Superior. Usually, they use 'em more on Lake Michigan to carry the new cars from the factories in Detroit. And this," Cookie went on, pointing his pipe at the long row of hatches separating the

Kennedy's stern and bow superstructures, "this is something you'll never see outside of the Lakes. Put these long boats on the ocean, boys, and those deep ocean swells would break them in two.

"But they're just right for the Lakes. It's what your biology teacher might call a perfect example of adaptation. Lake freighters are built for just two reasons, boys—to carry bulk cargoes like ore or coal or grain and to fit through the narrow locks at the Soo. They can build them as long as a city block, but they can't be too wide or too deep."

"Do they have storms on the Lakes, Cookie?" Jerry asked.

Cookie's eyes danced merrily and he jabbed his pipe at Jerry as he said, "Storms, hey! Let me tell you, boy, there's plenty of rough weather around the Great Lakes. Four months out of the year they're empty, the weather's so bad. That's why the boats are built to load and unload so fast. Sometimes you don't get more than seven months in a season. Rest of the time, the boats stay in port."

Cookie puffed thoughtfully in his pipe. He glanced downward. Below them, the dark lake water flowed swiftly past the *James Kennedy*'s hull.

"When a lake boat sinks," Cookie said somberly, "there ain't many survivors, if any."

"Why not, Cookie?" Sandy asked, surprised.

"That's pretty cold water down there, that's why. You don't last very long in that water if it happens to be early spring or fall. I've seen ice floating in these waters as late as it is now." He shivered a bit. "Cold water, boys. I remember once a feller I knew broke his leg and we didn't have no medicines aboard to help ease the pain while we was setting it. So we just hauled up a bucket of cold Lake Superior water and stuck his leg in it a while. By gum, it got numb in no time. He didn't feel a thing until after we'd got him all fixed up with a splint and bandages."

Cookie got to his feet. "That's one reason I never bothered to learn how to swim." He looked at the sky. "Well, time to go below again. We ought to hit the Soo just before dark."

He arose and walked over to the leeward, or starboard, side of the ship and began emptying his pipe. He leaned far over the rail to make sure that none of the still-glowing coals would land aboard ship.

As he did, a long, gathering swell from the wake of the car ferry that had overtaken and passed the *James Kennedy* struck the ship's port stern with

savage force. The *Kennedy* heeled slightly to starboard, and poor little Cookie, knocked off balance by the force of the blow, slithered over the rail.

With a long, wailing cry of despair, the little man plunged into the freezing-cold waters of Lake Superior.

CHAPTER SIX

Man Overboard!

"Man overboard!"

From fore and aft, from port to starboard, from every quarter of the *James Kennedy*'s great length, that ancient rallying cry of the sea arose.

"Man overboard!"

"Where?" they shouted. "Where?"

"Man overboard off the starboard stern!"

There was a mad scuffling of feet on the steel decks as the crewmen rushed for the rail, some to reach for a line and a life preserver, others merely to stare.

Hardly had Cookie's body entered the water with a resounding splash, than there was a clanging of bells in the engine room beneath Sandy and Jerry. The ship's motors roared in a rising

crescendo of power. The *James Kennedy* shivered and shuddered like a live thing, and out from beneath its stern there issued a wild, white boiling of angry water.

"Full speed astern!" someone cried.

Then, with another great quiver, the *James Kennedy* seemed to come to a halt.

All of this happened quickly, perhaps within only a few seconds. But rapid as had been the reactions of these trained seamen, they were still far behind the swift decisiveness of Sandy Steele.

The moment he had seen Cookie lose his balance, Sandy had braced his steel-muscled legs, ready to go to his aid. When their little friend's body had vanished, Sandy had raced over to the railing. Jerry was not far behind.

Sandy did not hesitate. He recalled, with dread, what Cookie had been telling them only moments before about the killing cold of the lake water. As he ran, he stripped off his own shirt and threw it to the winds. As he reached the railing, he knelt, swiftly untied his shoes, and pulled them off.

Down below him, Cookie's bald head had appeared above the surface.

"Help!" he called weakly. "Help!"

Then, before the horrified gaze of all aboard

the *Kennedy,* the little man choked on a mouthful of water, threw up his hands and sank out of sight.

Splash!

Straight as an arrow, Sandy Steele's body had swept out from the ship's side—hitting the water only a few feet to the side of the spot where Cookie had gone under.

Even as Sandy went beneath the surface, he felt a shiver run through his body from the tips of his toes to the top of his head. It was not only from the impact of having dropped twenty feet. It was from the terrible, numbing drop in temperature. For a moment he felt as though his body were a thing of stone.

But Sandy quickly got his legs and arms working. He surfaced and looked around him. Nothing.

Sandy dove down once more.

It was as black as night under the surface. Still, he forced himself farther and farther down, swinging his arms in front of him in long, slow, underwater breast strokes. He hoped to touch Cookie in this way, if he could not see him.

Sandy's lungs were bursting.

In another moment or two, he would have to

come back up. He dared not go down a second time, either, for the cold was creeping into even his tough young body.

Suddenly, his finger tips brushed against some object . . .

Sandy felt a thrill of joy. He stretched out his hands and felt something hard and unbending. His heart sang. He had grasped Cookie's shoe!

It was only just in time.

The little man had swallowed so much water and been in the lake so long that he had lost consciousness. When Sandy discovered him, he was headed down in what might have been his death dive.

Quickly, Sandy slid his hands along from Cookie's shoes to seize him firmly by the ankles.

With a savage, scissor kick of his long legs, Sandy drove upward to the surface.

How happy he was when his head at last burst into the open air and he could breathe again! Even though his ears had begun to ring, he could hear the great cheer that went up when he came into view, with Cookie safely in his arms.

"He's got him!" the crewmen cried. "He's got Cookie! Here, throw him a line!"

There was a splash beside his head and Sandy saw a length of rope floating in the water. Weakly,

he put out his hand to grasp it. With the other, he struggled to hold the unconscious Cookie's head above the water. Sandy felt himself getting weaker and weaker.

Would he make it? He felt a tug at the other end of the line. In despair, he felt the rope sliding through his powerless fingers.

There came another, far heavier, splash beside him.

Jerry James had come to his chum's rescue.

He had jumped in!

Blowing noisily through his nose, Jerry stroked over to Sandy's side. There were two more thuds in the water.

Life preservers.

"Here," Jerry gasped, getting his hands under Cookie's limp shoulders. "Let's get one of these doughnuts over his head."

Together, the two chums slipped the preserver over Cookie's head. They yanked up his arms and draped them over the ring, to make sure that he would not slip through it. Then, they pushed him over to the side of the gently rolling freighter, winding the rope about his waist.

"Okay," Sandy called, lifting a hand weakly from the water. "Haul away!"

The men at the rails pulled and Cookie slowly

left the water. As they lifted him, the pressure of the rope around his waist acted like a kind of artificial respiration. Water streamed from his open mouth as he made his ascent. At last, he was safely on deck, and then the two friends were pulled from the lake.

Instantly, they were wrapped in warm blankets. They were both glad that it was June, and not November, as they realized how cold they were, even though swathed in wool and bathed in sunlight. Somebody forced Sandy to swallow a little glass of burning liquid, and he guessed that it was rum from the heat of it in his stomach and the way his eyes began to water.

"Ugh," Sandy said, "I'd sooner drink a gallon of lake water."

"You nearly did," a harsh voice said; and, opening his eyes, Sandy saw Captain West forcing his way through the knot of sailors who had surrounded him. For once the skipper had shaved, though his eyes were bloodshot.

"That was a foolhardy stunt, boy," Captain West went on, growling and not noticing the rush of color into Sandy Steele's face. "You could have drowned."

"But what about Cookie, then? Did you want me to let him drown—sir?"

"Mind your tongue, boy. We've got lifeboats for that sort of thing. We'd have had him out of there in no time."

"But what about the lake cold?" Jerry James put in hotly. "It might have killed him before you could get to him."

Captain West sneered. "I can see you've been listening to Cookie's sea stories. The Lakes aren't that cold in June."

"Oh, n-no?" Jerry James asked wryly, pulling his blankets closer about him. "Th-then why are m-my t-t-teeth ch-chattering?"

A ripple of laughter ran through the onlooking men and Captain West swung on Jerry with his eyes sparking fiercely, furious at getting an argument from any of his crew.

"You young whippersnapper!" he roared. "If I had a brig aboard this ship, I'd put you in it—just to teach you some respect for your betters. Here," he snarled, whirling on the men, "get back to work, you lazy louts." He glanced at his watch. "You'll hear about it if we're late for the locks. All this grandstanding over a ship's cook!" He glared at Sandy and Jerry. "You two! Down below to the galley! And remember—jumping in after your bald-headed friend may have made extra work for yourselves. While Cookie's in bed

for the next day or two, I'm going to be expecting you to do his work!"

Then Captain West spun around and rolled forward to his bridge.

As Sandy Steele and his friend went down the ladder, hardly able to believe that any man could be so unfair, they felt the ship's engines begin to throb again.

The *James Kennedy* was once more making for the Soo.

CHAPTER SEVEN

In the Locks

"SANDY, we're sinking!"

Jerry James's forehead was wrinkled with concern beneath his jet-black hair as he uttered those words. It was the first thing either youth had said since they had returned to the galley and gone to work preparing the evening meal.

An hour ago, they had been shivering beneath their blankets. Now, the exertion of working in that overheated room, where the hard aluminum fixtures only served to refract the heat, had forced them to strip to the waist. Even so, their bodies glistened with sweat.

"I said we're sinking, Sandy," Jerry repeated, somewhat nervously.

Sandy nonchalantly swung the oven door shut

as though his friend had said nothing more upsetting than, "It's raining outside." Smiling, he took off his asbestos glove and laid it on the stove top.

"You know, Jerry, I believe you're right."

"But, Sandy, I'm not joking! I tell you, I can feel the ship going down."

"Of course you can," Sandy said easily. "Let's go watch it."

Then Sandy grinned—and Jerry James clapped his hands to his forehead in dismay and cried, "Of course; we're in the locks!"

"Right the second time," Sandy laughed. "And I'll bet if we had been going uplake, you would have sworn that we were flying! Come on, let's go topside."

They clambered above and feasted their eyes on one of the strangest sights they had ever seen.

The *James Kennedy* was floating in what can only be described as a long, narrow tub—almost a quarter mile in length and with about ten or fifteen feet clearance on either side of the sixty-foot-wide ship. What amazed Sandy and Jerry was that there were at least four more of these enormous, man-made tubs, some as large, others smaller. All of them held vessels of about the same size as the *Kennedy*. Some even held two of them.

The tubs were formed by huge water gates at either end. Behind their boat, Sandy and Jerry could see the water level of Lake Superior. What astonished them was that it seemed to be higher than they were!

And it was.

At that very moment, as the two friends glanced over the side, they could see that water was being pumped out of their tub. They were, as Jerry James had said, sinking! The level of the water in their tub was dropping so fast that more and more of the water gate behind them became visible. Now, they could see, it had actually become a dam, holding out the waters of Lake Superior that rose above them.

One of the strangest sensations was to turn and glance at another one of the locks—for that is what these tubs are called—to see a boat that was headed upstream rising higher and higher in the air. Its tub was filling with water, making it float higher and higher until it would reach the same level as Lake Superior, and then it would sail out.

"Boy, oh, boy," Jerry said, rolling his eyes. "I'm getting the same dizzy feeling you get in a department store. You know, Sandy—when you're on the down escalator and you pass somebody on the up escalator."

Sandy nodded in silence. He was too intent upon what was happening to bother to talk.

He craned his neck over the side to see what was happening up forward. Sandy saw that the *James Kennedy* was now well over ten feet below the level of Lake Superior. Suddenly, the water gates at the forward end of the lock swung open.

They sailed out!

Sandy shook his head in amazement, and then he heard a friendly voice beside him say, "Pretty tricky, hey?" Turning around, Sandy saw one of the seamen who had helped pull Cookie out of the water. He was short but well-built, with dark-red hair and warm brown eyes. Sandy knew that the other men called him Sam.

"Did you ever sail through the Soo before?" Sam asked.

He seemed pleased when Sandy shook his head, as though he was delighted to have someone he could explain things to. As he began to talk, Jerry joined them.

"First off, boys," Sam said, "I want you to know that the men all feel that was a mighty brave thing you did this afternoon. Don't feel too bad about what the skipper said, either. He has his good days and his bad ones, and I guess today was one of the bad ones."

Sandy and Jerry both bobbed their heads politely, hiding the grins that sprang to their faces when they realized that they were both thinking it was about time for Captain West to have one of his good days!

"Now," Sam said, with a note of pride in his voice, "I'll bet you didn't know that you've just passed through the biggest shipping highway in the world."

"Oh, no," Jerry argued. "You don't mean that the Soo is bigger than the Panama Canal."

"And the Suez, too?" Sandy asked.

"Bigger'n both, boys. Of course, I mean more ships pass through these locks. Look," he said, turning to survey the scene that was rapidly falling behind them. "Just look at that."

Sandy Steele and Jerry James did take a long look, and when they had finished, they were inclined to agree with Sam. In all, there must have been fifty of those peculiar long boats passing through the locks at one stage or another, their stubby smokestacks sending thin columns of smoke into the darkening sky.

"Boy, oh, boy," Jerry said. "And to think I never knew there was such a place two weeks ago."

"You weren't the only one, Jerry," Sam said, smiling. "There aren't too many Americans who

know what you mean when you say Sault Sainte Marie."

"What does that mean, anyway?" Sandy asked.

"Simple. It's French for Rapids of St. Mary. You see, where we're sailing now, the St. Mary's River dropped twenty feet in less than a mile. With all of Lake Superior pouring through here down into Huron, that made for mighty rapid rapids. The Indians used to carry their canoes around the rapids. So did the Frenchies. Of course, as soon as commerce started springing up between the Lakes cities, and as soon as they started tapping all that ore up north, they had to have a way into Lake Superior that was safe for the big boats. So they built the locks."

Neither youth opened his mouth to speak. They were impressed. But Sam's reference to the ore deposits had also recalled to their minds the fact that this was no ordinary summer's voyage for them. During the hard work of the day, and the excitement of pulling poor Cookie out of the water, they had forgotten their resolve to inform Mr. Kennedy of the good news that Captain West was treacherously keeping from him.

But now that Sam had spoken of ore, they remembered it, and Sandy asked the seaman, "Where are we headed now, Sam?"

"Well, now we're on Lake Huron. We'll head downlake for Detroit."

"I didn't know Detroit was on the Lakes."

"It isn't. Not properly, anyway. It's on the Detroit River, but that's just the waterway where Huron narrows and empties into Lake Erie."

"Oh. Will we lay over there?"

"Well—" Sam grinned—"if we don't—then I'm going to have a mighty disappointed wife and kids."

"Oh, you live there. Well, thanks, Sam. Come on, Jerry—we'd better be getting back to work."

The two friends went below. As they entered the galley and began setting up dinner, Sandy said to Jerry, "Maybe Captain West will let us go ashore in Detroit, tomorrow. If he does, we can telephone Mr. Kennedy."

Jerry pursed his lips. "You know, Sandy, I've been thinking. We don't really know that the skipper is working for that rival firm. I mean, all we have to go on is the fact that you saw him writing a letter addressed to a Mr. Paul Chadwick. That could just be coincidence."

"Pretty tall coincidence."

"Well, yes. But then again, Captain West might just happen to know Mr. Chadwick. It might be a personal letter."

"That's worse! Don't you remember what Mr. Kennedy said about Chadwick? He said he wasn't the sort of man he'd like to sit down to dinner with. He said he was only selling out because it was good business to accept his offer. If Captain West's a friend of Chadwick's, then he's no friend of Mr. Kennedy's!"

Sandy Steele was becoming excited. As usual, he had to keep brushing back the cowlick that kept falling in his eyes as he talked.

"Be reasonable, Jerry. Don't you remember how Mr. Briggs talked so insultingly of Mr. Kennedy when we first came aboard? 'Ma Kennedy' he called him. Then, when I was in Captain West's cabin, he kept calling him 'Old Man Kennedy.' Doesn't sound like much respect for their employer. And this afternoon, when we came on deck with Cookie, the skipper tried to pump me."

Jerry's eyes flew open.

"That's right," Sandy rushed on. "I didn't have time to tell you before. But he pretended to be friendly, just so he could find out how much I knew about Dad's discovery of the high-grade ore deposits."

Sandy Steele's lips tightened.

"No, Jerry," he said grimly. "Captain West is not to be trusted."

Then, to the horror of both youths, they heard an ugly, mocking voice saying, "You don't say?"

Sandy Steele and Jerry James turned and looked straight into the leering face of Captain West's mate.

He stood in the doorway of the galley. His slender, tall body swayed slightly, and from the glazed expression of his eyes, Sandy and Jerry could guess that he was drunk. There was a bottle bulging in his hip pocket, and Sandy recognized it as the one from which someone had poured that drink of rum for him abovedecks.

"So!" Mr. Briggs lisped in a drink-thickened voice. "So Ma Kennedy's little chicks don't trust their skipper, eh?"

"You'd better get some sleep, Mr. Briggs," Sandy said evenly.

The mate flushed angrily.

"Don't tell me what to do, you double-crossing little show-off!" he grated. "Here, stand aside there, and let a man pass."

He stepped into the galley, grinning wickedly, plainly unaware of how he wavered on his feet and disgusted, rather than frightened, the two youths. He all but fell as he moved to the little table on which Cookie had served them their breakfasts that morning. He sat down at it and

pulled out the nearly empty bottle of rum and stood it at his elbow.

"So you're going to run and tell tales out of school, hey? Going to tattle on us, are you?" He brought his hand down on the table top with a crash. "Not if I can help it!"

The rum bottle jumped and nearly fell to the floor. But Mr. Briggs grabbed it just in time. He threw back his head and tilted the bottle to his lips. "Ahhhh!" he said. "Now, serve me my dinner!"

Neither Sandy nor Jerry moved.

"You hear me?" the mate yelled angrily. "I'm mate aboard this scow. Bring me my dinner!"

Reluctantly, Jerry moved to obey. Mr. Briggs watched him, scowling. Then he banged the bottle on the table and said, "Have a drink, Blackie. That'll put some zip into those lazy legs of yours."

"My name's Jerry," Jerry replied hotly. "And I don't drink."

"Don't drink, hey? Regular sissy, aren't you? Well, I'm mate aboard this scow, and when I tell a man to drink, he drinks!"

Mr. Briggs lurched to his feet. Still swaying, he seized the bottle by its neck and moved toward Jerry.

Sandy Steele moved quickly to head him off. He

well knew Jerry's split-second temper and he wanted to stop the mate before he did something he would regret.

"Please, sir," he pleaded. "Don't! He's getting your dinner. Now, if you'll just sit down—"

The mate shouldered Sandy roughly aside.

"Out of my way," he mumbled. "Here, you," he said to Jerry, swinging the bottle up in an arc, "take a drink like I ordered you to."

As Mr. Briggs brought the bottle up with a speed that might have dug the mouth of it deep into Jerry's throat, the youth raised his own arm to defend himself. The bottle struck him on the forearm. A jet of rum came streaming out. It fell on the open flame of the stove, and a sheet of blue flame leaped up into the air.

It came dangerously close to the reeling mate. Frightened, Mr. Briggs brought his right arm around as though to shield his face from the flames. But he had forgotten that he still held the bottle. His gesture emptied the remainder of the bottle onto the stove and another jet of flames leaped toward him. This time, the fire reached one of the roasts standing on the stove.

With a popping and sizzling, the roast came alight, and now the panicky Mr. Briggs lunged for the roasting pan to remove it from danger.

But all he succeeded in doing was to overturn a pan of grease, into which, in terror, he dropped the flaming roast.

In an instant, Cookie's beloved galley had become a roaring caldron of flames.

"Fire!" he shrieked, and charged blindly into the passageway, covering his face with his hands.

"Fire! Fire! All hands on deck! Captain, Captain—come quick! Those blasted boys of Kennedy's have set the ship on fire!"

CHAPTER EIGHT

Fire!

FOR A SPLIT SECOND, Sandy and Jerry stood rooted in helpless anger.

It was bad enough that the drunken, clumsy mate had set the galley ablaze. But now he had shifted the blame to them! The injustice of it was an outrage, and for the space of that split second, the two youths were so stunned that they could not move.

Then they sprang into action.

And to Jerry James's amazement, Sandy Steele turned and ran from the flaming room.

"Sandy!" Jerry called. "Sandy, come back!"

But Sandy Steele kept on running up the passageway, and Jerry could not believe what he saw. Then, when Sandy disappeared into the cabin

where Cookie had been placed, Jerry understood. "Good old Sandy," he said proudly, and then he whirled and dashed down the passageway in the other direction—hunting for a fire extinguisher.

Cookie was half out of his bunk when Sandy rushed through the opened door. The little man had heard Mr. Briggs's shout, and he had immediately dragged himself from his pillows. He was going to help put out the fire!

But he was too weak to get very far, and he lay half in, half out of his bed, panting, when Sandy burst in on him.

"Quick, Cookie!" Sandy said. "The galley's on fire."

"I know, boy," Cookie gasped. "I heard the mate." His eyes were sad as he gazed at Sandy. "How could you do it, Sandy?"

"I didn't!" Sandy gritted between clenched teeth, as he stooped to wrap blankets around Cookie, before coming erect in the fireman's carry.

"But the mate said—"

"He did it, not us!" Sandy replied. "Come on, Cookie—there's no time for explanations."

Gently supporting the little man on his right shoulder, Sandy hurried from the room. He took him to the cabin farthest from the blaze. Once

inside, he placed Cookie on the bunk. The weakened little man looked around him in astonishment.

"This is the mate's quarters," he burst out. "You can't put me in here, boy."

"Never mind that," Sandy said grimly. "I'd put you in the captain's quarters, if I thought it would be safer. I'm not taking any chances on your getting trapped by the fire, Cookie."

"Is it really that bad?"

"I don't know, but I'll soon find out! Now, you just stay put while I go back and help fight the fire."

Without another word, Sandy turned and raced back down the passageway.

A wild scene greeted Sandy's eyes.

Thick, greasy clouds of smoke—from the roasts and the other cuts of meat that had caught fire—rolled from the galley. Through the smoke, he could see the red and yellow of the flames. Sometimes a sheet of fire would lance out through the smoke, and there would be a hissing and a crackling that would warn the smoke-grimed and panting fire fighters that another big can of lard had exploded and caught fire and was now making their task even harder.

All along the passageway lay thick lines of hose. They were crisscrossed and intertwined, and, sometimes, when they leaped under the pressure of the water coursing through them, they gave the passageway the look of a snake pit.

Crewmen wearing fire helmets dashed up and down, helter-skelter, some of them with fire extinguishers in their hands, others carrying fire axes. A bucket brigade had been formed among the spare crewmen, and Sandy saw the buckets passing from hand to hand with the precision of an assembly line in a factory. The empty buckets would be passed up the ladder to be refilled by a man who fastened them to a rope and then lowered them into the lake.

From what Sandy could see, most of the fire seemed to be centered in the middle of the galley, next to the stove. Luckily, Cookie had wisely insisted that his old grease-soaked wooden cabinets be replaced by nonflammable metal ones, otherwise the fire would have been uncontrollable. As it was, it was bad enough. Flames shot higher and higher from the meat-chopping table. Here, the thick slab of wood had become thoroughly soaked by the overturned grease. Beneath the terrible roaring sound it gave off as it burned, Sandy could hear the hissing and snapping of the grease.

Above all the sound and fury of the fire itself, and the excited babble of the men as they rushed here and there to prevent the flames from spreading to the mess hall, Sandy could hear the booming of Captain West's voice.

"You, there!" he shouted at Jerry James. "You with the fire extinguisher—over here! Now, then, through the smoke here onto that table!"

With his head picturesquely swathed in an undershirt which he kept removing to soak with water, Captain West was a romantic figure as he rushed up and down the passageway directing the fire fighting.

"Water!" he would thunder. "More water!" Or else: "You ax men, get busy in the mess hall! Chop up those tables and benches and get the wood abovedecks!"

Seeing him, hearing him, Sandy wished that Captain West was as loyal as he was commanding.

But there was little time for Sandy to waste in admiration of the skipper. All of these things that he witnessed passed through his mind in one swift, crowding instant—and then he too leaped into action.

The moment that Sandy rushed up there had been a loud explosion in the galley, and one of the ax men was thrown back against the bulkhead by

the force of it. He slumped to the deck, unconscious, and his ax slipped from his hand.

Quick as a flash, Sandy seized the ax and joined the men at work in the mess hall, while two others quickly jumped to obey the skipper's orders to remove the stricken man to a safe place. With a thrilling surge of confidence in the strength of his lean-muscled body, Sandy Steele began to swing his ax. His first stroke went whistling through the air and the ax blade bit deep into the thick wood of a bench. With a wrench requiring all of his power, Sandy yanked it free. Once again, he drove the blade downward.

Swish! Crack!

The bench split in two. Quickly, shortening his grip on the ax handle like a batter dragging a hit, Sandy stroked twice, backward and forward, and the bench had become a neatly stacked pile of kindling. With a glance of admiration, one of the crewmen scuttled forward, seized the bundle of sticks in his arms and carried them topside.

Meanwhile, as the men with the axes steadily demolished the mess-hall furniture, getting it safely out of harm's way, the fire in the galley seemed to rage higher and higher. The heat in the passageway was now intense. The naked torsos of the fire fighters gleamed in the reflected light of

the flames, and rivulets of sweat marked their course down flesh blackened by the greasy smoke. As the roar of the flames grew louder and louder, the expression of concern on Captain West's face grew deeper.

He was thinking of the coal bunkers directly beneath the galley. If the fire should ever get to them, that would be the end!

Anxiously, Captain West peered through the smoke. It stung his eyes and made them water. He had to wind a wet cloth around his mouth to keep from choking. But he saw what he wanted to see.

That chopping table was still blazing away like an enormous torch. In fact, it was a torch—for the grease had prepared it for burning as completely as any stick dipped in pitch. But Captain West had seen that the fiery table had been partially burned through at the point where it was fastened to the wall. If he could chop it the rest of the way, the table would fall down. Then it could be pulled out into the passageway with hooks and the hoses could play upon it with full force.

In that way, Captain West reasoned, he could attack the fire at its very heart. Immediately, the skipper called for one of the ax-bearing crewmen to attempt the job. There was no time to lose.

Another five or ten minutes, and the coal would go up!

The crewman slipped quickly into a heavy raincoat to shield his body from the flames. He saturated a cloth with water, wound it around his lower face, and plunged into the smoke.

In an instant, he came reeling back—choking and sputtering.

"It's too much, sir," he gasped. "No man can go into that stuff and live."

Before Captain West could reply, Sandy Steele had raced down the passageway from the mess hall.

"Let me have that raincoat," he said to the astounded man. "I think I know a way to get that table out."

Still choking, the man took off his coat. Captain West opened his mouth to protest, but then, seeing that Sandy was dead serious, he closed it again and let the determined youth take over.

"Jerry!" Sandy called to his chum. "Quick! You get one on, too. Then, you protect me with the fire extinguisher while I swing the ax."

Jerry James nodded. Like his friend, he garbed himself in one of the heavy black slickers, covered his nose and mouth with a soaked cloth, and preceded him into the smoke. Jerry held his ex-

tinguisher like a soldier wielding a light machine gun, spraying the flames with a constant stream of thick, white chemicals.

Behind him moved Sandy Steele, grasping his ax.

The combination that worked so well on the playing fields of their home state of California was now going into action far, far from home, and in a far more serious cause. But it was working just as well!

Choking, sputtering, staggering, all but blinded, Sandy Steele charged to the reddish blur he could see a few feet ahead of him in the smoke. Waves of heat rolled against his body and he felt himself going weak. But he lowered his head and struck on.

Once, a tongue of flame seemed about to gather in volume and leap toward him from the roaring chopping-block. Just in time, a jet of thick white liquid streamed out toward it and smothered it before it could get started. Good old Jerry, Sandy thought.

At last, he had made it to within a few feet of the burning table!

It was as close as he dared go.

Without hesitation, Sandy Steele raised his ax and brought it down, hard.

Crash!

The table seemed to sway. Sandy raised his arms again, wondering if he would have the strength for another blow. He was thoroughly sick, now—nauseated by that sickening, grease-laden smoke. The effort of his first mighty stroke had all but sapped his strength. Yet, he could not falter now! He had to do it! One more stroke would slice through the remaining wood. Calling upon all his reserves, Sandy Steele rocked backward on his heels, rose on his toes and brought the ax down upon the wood.

It was a blow that rang out even above the roar of the flames. Even the weary men gathered in the passageway could hear it.

And it severed the table from the thick bolt that had held it to the bulkhead.

Sandy Steele jumped back just in time.

With a loud crash and a flashing of sparks and a shooting of flames, the table fell toward him.

The momentum of Sandy's jump sent him staggering backward, off balance. That was how he emerged from the cloud of smoke that separated the excited, yelling crewmen from the fire inside the galley.

Behind Sandy, running low and gasping, but

still clutching his fire extinguisher, came Jerry James.

If someone had not caught Sandy, he would have gone sprawling. As it was, he was having difficulty keeping his legs under him. They seemed to have gone all rubbery from his ordeal. But he clenched his teeth and stayed erect, watching as the crewmen began to drag the blazing table from the galley into the direct play of massed hoses and extinguishers. It sizzled and smoked and sent off clouds of steam as though it were a small volcano, but the fire was at last put out.

Then, one by one, all of the other burning articles within the galley were separated from the main body of the fire and doused. The hoses sent streams of lake water splashing against the now-smoldering and smoking bulkheads. The bucket brigade was disbanded, for it was no longer needed.

And then, as Sandy Steele felt the youthful vigor of his body swiftly returning, his eyes fell on an object that he dearly wished to preserve for the eyes of Captain West.

It was the rum bottle.

It lay beside the stove, almost at the exact point

where it had fallen from the hand of Mr. Briggs.

Here was not only the cause of the fire. Here was proof of who really had started it!

Sandy slipped from the support of the friendly arms that had grasped him. He bent to pick up an asbestos glove dropped by one of the crewmen. He slipped it on his right hand and walked quickly forward to retrieve the bottle.

As he leaned over, he felt himself jostled aside. He nearly fell down again. A tall man stepped in front of him and swung the flat of an ax down on the bottle. He did it deliberately. He shattered the bottle into a hundred pieces.

"Why did you do that?" Sandy cried, unable to hide his anger.

The man in front of him turned with a wicked smile, and said, "You could have burned yourself on that, Little Lord Show-off—and you're in enough hot water already."

It was Mr. Briggs.

CHAPTER NINE

Charged with Arson

No one was less surprised than Sandy Steele when the order came for him and Jerry James to report to Captain West in his cabin.

It was by then close to midnight. Once the fire had been put out, there had remained the task of clearing away the debris and cleaning up. This had occupied the crew for a few more hours, and Sandy and Jerry had not been happy to hear the grumbles about burned suppers and lost sleep or to see the glances of hostility that were directed their way. Mr. Briggs, it seemed, had been as expert in spreading his falsehoods among the crew as he had been in taking them to Captain West.

Only Sam had remained friendly, and it had been Sam who had brought the order.

"Captain says you two are to report to him right away," Sam said. He shook his head sadly. "Too bad, boys," he went on. "If I can read storm signals right, I'd say you were in for it."

"In for it!" Jerry burst out hotly. "It that what we get for putting out the fire?"

"Hold it, Jerry," Sandy said gently, calming his friend down. "That won't do any good." He looked at Sam. "I suppose Mr. Briggs is with him?"

Sam seemed surprised. "Now, how do you know that?"

Sandy's answer was a grim tightening of his lips. On the subject of Mr. Briggs, he did not trust himself to speak. Sandy wondered how much longer he was going to be able to control his temper. It seemed to him that every time either he or Jerry did something they were supposed to do, even something they really needn't have done, their only reward was some penalty or a leer from Mr. Briggs or an insult from the skipper. What had begun as a high school boy's dream of a splendid way to spend the summer seemed to be turning into a nightmare. Sandy let out his breath in a deep sigh. He looked at Jerry and was startled to see the sulky expression on his friend's normally cheerful countenance.

"I'm not going," Jerry said sullenly.

"Wha-a-at?" Sam said, as though he couldn't believe his ears. "What did you say, young fellow?"

Before Jerry could reply, Sandy had propelled him up the passageway and out of earshot. He didn't want their friend Sam to get the notion that they were mutinous.

"Jerry," he whispered fiercely, "you've got to stop talking like that!"

"I don't care!" Jerry said stoutly. "We've been pushed around long enough, and now I've got to get it off my chest. Listen, Sandy—you know very well what's going to happen when we get in there with the captain. He's going to accuse us with a lot of lies that he's heard from the mate. He'll not only forget that we risked our lives to get at that table, but he'll turn around and say we started the fire."

"Shhh!" Sandy said, looking around anxiously.

Jerry lowered his voice, but he didn't stop talking. "It's true! Why, look what he said to you after you rescued poor old Cookie from drowning! He acted as though you'd jumped in just to make him late for the Soo Locks. Honestly, Sandy, I don't know why you bother—"

"Because we've got to!" Sandy insisted, squeezing Jerry's arm. "Don't you realize that a captain

aboard ship is a lot different from a teacher or a football coach? He's got you in his power, Jerry. His word is law! Really. You can't disobey him!"

"Oh, no?" Jerry said.

"If you do," Sandy warned, "you'll wind up in jail. I mean it, Jerry. Now is just the time when we've got to keep our heads." He dropped his voice to a whisper. Then he went on: "Captain West must know by now that we've found out about him. You remember that Mr. Briggs was out in the passageway, eavesdropping, while we were talking about it. He's certainly told the skipper. Now, with the fire, he's got an excuse to do something that will keep us from warning Mr. Kennedy."

Jerry's eyes widened. "Such as what?" he asked.

"Such as locking us up somewhere."

There was a momentary silence, and then Jerry James groaned and said, "Boy, oh, boy, we really *are* in trouble, aren't we?"

Sandy smiled in relief. He could tell by the tone of his friend's voice that he had gotten over his resentment. With a reassuring squeeze of Jerry's arm, Sandy continued, "We are. That's why we've got to stay calm. So, whatever you do, Jerry, don't say or do anything foolish when we get in there with Captain West."

Jerry James's jaw tightened and he clapped his friend on the arm. "Right," he said, and then the two of them walked up the passageway and knocked on the door of Captain West's cabin.

"Come in," the skipper growled.

They entered.

"What took you so long?" Captain West snapped.

"We were delayed," Sandy said.

"Oh," the skipper mocked, glancing over at his mate, who sat on the bunk. "Did you hear that, Briggs? They were delayed, he says. Well," he sneered, his voice turning ugly, "you'll have plenty of time for delays where I'm putting you."

The skipper peered at them with eager expectation, as though he hoped his remarks would goad them into losing their tempers. Observing this, Sandy was inwardly pleased. He realized that the skipper could not be too confident of himself, that he was not sure of how much the youths actually knew—no matter what Mr. Briggs had said to him.

"Well?" the skipper roared, crashing his fist down on his desk. "What have you to say to that?"

"Nothing, sir," Sandy replied evenly.

A red flush began to spread over Captain West's face. But it was supplanted by a cunning look.

"Playing doggo, eh?" he muttered. "Well, we'll see." He looked over at his mate with a grin, and said, "Now, you just tell that story of yours again, Mr. Briggs."

The mate nodded.

"It was this way, sir," he started, gazing up at the overhead with an expression of shocked innocence. "Just before suppertime, I happened to be passing the galley and saw these two." He lowered his eyes and jabbed a dirty thumb in the direction of Sandy and Jerry. Then he raised his eyes again and said, "They were playing catch with a can of tomatoes."

Jerry gasped in indignation, and Sandy quickly gave him a warning nudge.

"That's what they were doing, sir—throwing it back and forth like a couple of schoolkids at a picnic. Then this black-haired fellow here, he let go a good one and it went right through the grandstander's hands and hit the can of fat on the stove and knocked it over on the fire. And then, sir," the mate concluded, a note of smugness in his voice, "then, sir, the fat was really in the fire."

With a look of gloating, the captain swung his eyes on Sandy and Jerry—and that was when Sandy opened his mouth and said, "He's a liar."

Almost the moment that the words dropped from his lips, Sandy Steele wished he could have bitten his tongue in two. But he had finally had to give in to the resentment that had been smoldering inside him almost from the moment he had walked aboard the *James Kennedy*. But, to say that, after all his good advice to Jerry! He glanced over at his friend, half expecting him to be disgusted with him.

He was grinning!

Then Sandy had to laugh, too—if not from the delight so plain on Jerry's saucy face, then from the look of injury on the face of the mate. Mr. Briggs actually acted as though he had been unfairly accused! So, Sandy laughed—and when he did, Captain West arose from his chair with a roar of rage.

"Get out of here! You smooth-faced, insubordinate little firebugs! Get back to your quarters and stand by to face a court of inquiry on charges of arson and insubordination! That'll teach you to laugh at me and call my mate a liar! Eh? How about that, eh? How will your friend, Old Man Kennedy, like that, eh, when he hears that his white-faced schoolboys are headed for some Buffalo jail? And you, Mr. Briggs, I'm ordering you to

keep these two under lock and key until we get to Buffalo." Then, puffing up his chest like a giant bullfrog, Captain West issued a final roar:

"GET OUT!"

Their heads held high, Sandy and Jerry marched back to their quarters.

And the door had hardly swung shut behind them, before the skipper whirled and pounced upon his mate with the low snarl of an enraged puma. With a cry and a whimper, the fawning mate who had opened his mouth for words of toadying praise, cringed back against the bulkhead.

"No, Skipper, don't," he whined, but Captain West ignored his pleas and seized him by the shirt collar and began to shake him.

"You lying, sniveling drunk!" the skipper growled. "Do you think you fooled me for a moment? I saw you smash that rum bottle in front of that Steele boy's face tonight. I smelled your breath when you came reeling down the passageway, shrieking like the lily-livered ninny you are." He shook Mr. Briggs again, fiercely. "Do you think I believed that cock-and-bull story of yours? Do you? Answer me!"

Terrified, the mate babbled, "N-no, sir."

"But you still took me for a fool, is that it?" the skipper snarled, almost beside himself. Then, seeing Mr. Briggs burst into a fit of uncontrollable blubbering, he uttered a growl of disgust and flung him back on the bunk like a sack of wheat. He returned to his desk and sat down again.

"Briggs," he said heavily, "if it wasn't for the fact that I can make use of you, I'd have skinned you alive long ago. I pretended to believe you tonight only because I saw a chance to put those nosy brats of Kennedy's in their place. I want them under lock and key until that deal is signed in Buffalo. And that's the day after tomorrow." The skipper drew another deep breath. "They belong to you, Briggs," he said. "And you'll answer for them with your hide." His voice took on an ugly, menacing tone that raised bumps of fear all along the mate's spine.

"If something goes wrong, Briggs, if I see you so much as look at another bottle, I'll flay that hide of yours from one end of the Lakes to the other. I've got too much at stake to fool around! Paul Chadwick wants those Kennedy boats and I want him to get them. If it's the last thing I do, I'm going to be chief captain of the combined Chadwick and Kennedy lines—and no high school kids

are going to get in my way by telling Old Man Kennedy about those high-grade ore discoveries. So, remember that, Briggs—and now get out of here and let me get some sleep."

Still trembling, the shaken mate crept from Captain West's quarters and closed the door softly behind him. Then he slipped down the passageway toward the tiny cabin occupied by Sandy Steele and Jerry James.

The moment Mr. Briggs vanished from sight, the door of the cabin adjoining the skipper's came stealthily open. Then, slowly, the figure of a little bald-headed man emerged. He shut the door carefully behind him, and then glanced swiftly up and down the corridor.

On tiptoe, he slipped over to Captain West's door. He bent his head to listen. Then he backed off carefully and raised both clenched fists to shake them in a gesture of anger and defiance, before he whirled silently and made his way out of sight.

The little bald-headed man was Cookie.

He had heard every word spoken in the captain's cabin since Sandy and Jerry had made their appearance there. Every inch of his little frame burned with determination to come to the rescue of his young friends and help thwart the schemes of the crafty Captain West.

In their own cabin, meanwhile, the two friends had just climbed wearily into their bunks.

Suddenly they shot erect as they heard a rattling and clanking outside their door. But they knew in the next instant what the noise meant. It was Mr. Briggs "dogging down" the heavy outside handle.

"Well," Jerry said, "now we're prisoners."

"Yes," Sandy said, "but I have a funny feeling that things are going to start to get better."

"Why?"

"Because," Sandy said grimly, "they couldn't possibly get any worse."

CHAPTER TEN

The Unsalted Seas

UNFORTUNATELY, Sandy Steele was wrong.

Things could get worse, and they did.

They worsened, not only for the two youths from Valley View, California, but for everyone aboard the *James Kennedy*—to say nothing of all those other thousands of human souls who sailed the lower Lakes on that memorable summer morning.

For it was on that morning that a freak summer storm that had been rushing down from the north, roared like a scourge across Lake Huron before bursting in all its fury upon the shallow waters of Lake Erie. It was a storm that blew with shattering force across a body of water notorious for rough weather.

There are no storms so sudden and so strong as those that fall upon the Great Lakes, and Sandy Steele and Jerry James were about to witness one of the worst within the memory of the grizzled sailors of "the unsalted seas."

There are the treacherous gales, and sometimes hurricanes, of late fall or early winter—those wailing winds that sheathe a ship in fresh-water ice, before driving it to its destruction.

In the days of sailing ships, there have been single storms upon the Lakes in which as many as a hundred ships—with thousands of sailors and passengers—have perished within twenty-four hours. Steam-driven freighters, and motorships, too, have sunk to the bottom of these cold waters —and more than a few of the ocean liners that have managed to make their way to the Lakes via the St. Lawrence River have gone to a fresh-water grave.

The very first ship to sail the Lakes was the bark, *Griffon,* of the famous French explorer, LaSalle. It set sail from Buffalo on August 7, 1679, reached the shores of Lake Michigan, and then disappeared completely on its return voyage.

From Superior to Ontario, the floors of the Lakes are littered with all manner of ships that have gone down in these storms—with their

cargoes, their jewels, their gold, their stacks of currency still undamaged in safes.

And it is above the surface of Lake Erie, the body of water toward which the *James Kennedy* was placidly steaming, that the Great Lakes storms blow the worst and the wildest. For Lake Erie is the shallowest of all the lakes. Its average depth is only 70 feet, compared to that of 250 for the rest of them. At its deepest, it is only 210 feet—compared to 1,180 feet on Lake Superior.

Erie is a shallow saucer, a basin, and when the winds go whistling across its surface they create something of the effect that a boy might make by blowing onto a shallow saucer of water—but on a much, much greater scale. The winds whip up mountainous waves that can break a freighter in two. There have been storms on Lake Erie as freakish and furious as that recorded by the veteran mariner who had moored his vessel on the Canadian shore opposite Buffalo. To his amazement, the wind blew so savagely that it drove the water out and away from his ship's hull and left him sitting there, high and dry!

Even today, in our modern age, there have been freighters that have ventured into Erie storms, from whom nothing has been heard except a last, despairing message: "We are breaking up."

So it was on Lake Erie that this unusual summer storm struck with such violence, only a few hours after the *James Kennedy* had left the Detroit River and swung its prow east by north for Buffalo.

Oddly enough, Captain West was elated when the storm broke.

He would not have been quite so overjoyed had he known how terrible it would become. But his first reaction to the gale was simply that this would probably keep the *James Kennedy,* and the two youths, out on the Lakes until well after Mr. Paul Chadwick had finished his deal with Mr. Kennedy.

In fact, Captain West had decided against going ashore in Detroit for much the same reasons. He had suddenly realized that it might be risky to place Sandy Steele and Jerry James within reach of a big city—with its telephones and telegraphs, and, worse, its buses and railroads. They might, in some way, get off the ship. Then they would be free to warn Mr. Kennedy.

So Captain West had left orders to make downriver past Detroit and out into Lake Erie.

He awoke to the shudder and roll of his ship. In his ears, he could hear the whine of a rising

wind. When he gazed out of his porthole, his eyes fell on a slate-gray sea.

"A storm!" he cried, grinning with wicked delight. "Oh, ho, Captain West's luck is running good. This'll close that deal for good and all!"

Pleased as could be, the skipper sprang from his bunk and began putting on his foul-weather clothing. He strode briskly from his cabin. About to make topside, he paused at the mate's door. He swung it open and leaned in.

"Briggs, I think you'd better unlock those boys."

The mate gawked as though he couldn't believe his ears, but Captain West held up a thick, hairy paw when he opened his mouth to protest.

"Do as I say! They're not going anywhere, especially in this storm. It's one thing to keep them locked up like that under the pretext of facing charges, Briggs. But it's another to have them trapped below decks during a storm."

The mate nodded obediently, and Captain West wheeled and headed for the ladder. Moving along the passageway, he was surprised to find that he had to stretch out flat against the bulkhead to keep from falling. The *James Kennedy* was bucking that much!

Clambering up the ladder, he needed all his

strength to keep from being thrown below. When he got on deck, the wind seemed to whistle through his ears, and he pursed his lips in a whistle of his own when he observed the huge, rising seas and the dirty clouds scudding low and threatening above him.

Glancing over the side, Captain West whistled again.

There was a good two feet less of freeboard already, and the *James Kennedy* seemed to be plunging deeper into the steely, rain-dimpled waves. Captain West pulled his cap lower on his forehead and thrust one powerful shoulder ahead of him as he bucked into the screaming wind. The rain came slanting at him in sheets and raked his face. He ducked his chin deeper into his shoulder, not quite so jubilant a skipper as he had been upon awakening.

For this, indeed, was the start of a real blow!

Below decks, Sandy Steele and Jerry James were awake, too. They had been so for perhaps a half hour before Captain West, roused from a deep sleep by the unfamiliar pitching of the vessel. Now they sat on the lower bunk. Both boys had deeply serious expressions on their faces. Sandy was not even aware of the cowlick that hung forward on

his forehead, and Jerry James's brow was a mass of wrinkles. They were listening to the steady clanking and groaning of the *James Kennedy*'s steel fibers as the laden ore boat rolled in the rising seas. Even below, they could hear the thin wailing of the winds above.

"Sounds like a real storm, Sandy."

"Yes, and do you realize what this could mean?"

"Well, I guess it could mean anything—that is, if it got bad enough."

"Oh, I don't mean sinking or anything like that. I mean it could keep us from reaching Buffalo in time."

"Oh," Jerry said, in a small, glum voice, and for a time neither youth spoke. Then they heard a rattling at their door.

It opened, and the unfriendly face of Mr. Briggs peeped in. The two youths leaped to their feet.

"Stay where you are!" the mate snapped. "You ain't going anywheres." He grunted, pushing the door back and securing it against the bulkhead. "Skipper says he wants your door open. Can't say as I agree with him, but he's the skipper."

"Can we go out?" Sandy asked.

"No."

"How about some food?" Jerry queried, rubbing his stomach.

The mate snickered. "You'll get the same as the others—biscuits and water." He snickered again. "That's all the food that's left after what you two boobs done to the galley."

"What *we* did!" they chorused, indignantly.

"Yes, you!" the mate snarled, backing into the passageway. "And don't try to come it over me with that innocent-angels business."

Sandy and Jerry exchanged glances of amazement, and then, again, they burst out laughing.

"Boy, oh, boy," Jerry breathed, to the annoyance of the mate, "when our Mr. Briggs tells a story, he sticks to it!"

The mate's mouth flew open for an angry reply, but then, it just remained agape and not a sound issued forth.

The mate seemed to be rising in the air, towering over the two youths in the cabin. He lost his balance and fell. His mouth still yawning and his hands frantically clawing for a hold on the smooth steel deck, he began to slide toward them.

Then the boys were hurled backward against the bulkhead. They struck it with a crash and slithered to the floor, all but stunned.

For one long dreadful moment, it seemed to all three of them that the *James Kennedy* would never return from that sickening roll to starboard. There was that bottomless instant when it appeared that the heavily burdened vessel would never stop heeling over until it had turned turtle and plunged to the bottom.

Then, it stopped.

It seemed to hang in the air.

Sandy and Jerry drew their breath in sharply. They had the terrible sensation that there was nothing beneath the *James Kennedy* to support it, and that once this long, hanging pause had ended —it would drop, drop, drop. Slowly, they let their breath out.

The vessel had begun to right itself.

With the same slow, deliberate, rolling motion, it heeled over to port, and now it was Sandy and Jerry who rose in the air above the mate and who felt themselves sliding toward him. Again, it seemed that the *James Kennedy* would overturn, and the hanging sensation was repeated. But when the vessel had righted itself this time, it seemed merely to shiver—before plowing straight ahead.

Scrambling erect, the two youths stared at Mr. Briggs. The mate's face had been drained of color and his little eyes glistened with fear.

"That," he said, in a voice hoarse with awe and disbelief, "was a wave!"

Up above, in the pilothouse, Captain West had watched that monster swell come and go, and now even he was a trifle shaken as he mopped his brow in relief. He wondered what would have happened if that wall of water had struck them fore and aft, rather than abeam.

He gazed through his windows and wagged his head gravely. The winds still rose in violence. They whipped at the *James Kennedy* from every quarter, seeming to change direction every other moment like a cyclone gone mad. The seas were a battering confusion. The waves ran this way, the wind another. Between them, they tore at the ship's superstructure and thundered against her sides. Sometimes two great waves would dash at each other from opposite directions, colliding with a great roar and a shattering shower of spray.

Captain West saw with alarm that the waves were increasing in height. They were already well past ten feet. They would go on to twenty, of that he was disturbingly certain—and after that?

After that, Captain West knew, waves and running seas of that height would batter the long, nar-

row, shallow *James Kennedy* until she broke in two. He no longer placed such great importance on staying out of port to make sure of Mr. Chadwick's deal. He would have given anything, just then, to be safe and snug behind the breakwater at Buffalo.

Peering through his rain-splashed windows, the skipper sought a glimpse of some other vessel. But his visibility had been greatly reduced by the sheets of rain and the darkening skies. The unearthly light that had greeted him when he came on deck had been slowly subsiding. Now, as the clock raced on toward noon and the storm raged on in unabated fury, he could see only the clashing seas around him and hear that high-pitched wailing of the wind.

He shook himself.

"This is bad, very bad," he said to Sam, who had taken over as wheelsman.

"Aye, aye, sir," Sam said. "I've been through some bad ones on the Lakes—but I've not seen any worse than this one. And it's just starting, if I read the signals right."

The captain bobbed his head in unhappy assent. The *James Kennedy* staggered and seemed to shake herself as she drove forward into a wall of lake water, and he embraced a stanchion to

keep his feet. He waited until the vessel had steadied herself, and then he lurched across the pilothouse to the rear windows to stare with dismay at the spectacle below him.

Grayish seas were swamping the decks of the *James Kennedy,* and the crewmen were frantically at work trying to secure the hatch of one of the holds. Wind and water had torn at a corner of the steel hatch and had peeled it back as though a giant can opener had been at work. Each time the *Kennedy* dug into one of the heavy seas swinging toward it, the crewmen would seize the rails and hang on for dear life while the water swept down on them.

Then, while the vessel rose high again and the waters ran off the sides, they would resume the battle against the hatch—battering away at it with sledge hammers in an attempt to seal the hold.

One look at this scene was enough for Captain West. He could see at a glance that more men were needed.

"Mr. Briggs!" he shouted at his mate through the speaking tube. "Get every available man up on deck to Number Four hatch!"

The mate's voice wailed hollowly in reply: "They're all up there already, sir—every man that can be spared."

"Nonsense, Briggs! Who else have you got down there?"

"Just myself and those two high school brats."

Captain West fell silent. He frowned. The ship shuddered and he was forced to grab Sam's shoulder for support. Below, he could see the angry waters sweeping down the decks while the crewmen clung in terror to the rail. Many of them, he noticed, had wrapped lines around their waists and secured them to the railing. But there just weren't enough of them—and that hatch, yawning like a fatal hole in the ship's armor, just had to be closed! If it was not, if it grew larger, then the lake water would pour through. It would saturate the tons and tons of ore that lay in the typical ore freighter's single huge hold. The weight of the *James Kennedy* would be at least doubled, and the merest ripple or slightest breeze might suffice to send her plunging to the bottom!

No, that hatch must be sealed! Every available hand was needed to do it, and quickly, even though they might belong to the most troublesome pair of youths Captain West had ever known.

"Send them up, Mr. Briggs," he ordered, and turned to give additional orders to the wheelsman, Sam.

Below, Mr. Briggs aimed a thumb at his "pris-

oners" and grunted, "Get up to Number Four hatch on the double. You heard the captain, so you know what's wanted. Take a crowbar there, and you both better have a line." He leered. "If you want to get to Buffalo, you'd better tie yourself to the rail up there and hang on tight."

Without a word, Sandy Steele and Jerry James seized coils of rope from hooks along the passageway. Then Sandy grasped a crowbar and the two hastened topside.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Big Blow

SANDY COULD NOT SUPPRESS a gasp of astonishment the moment he emerged on deck and felt the smashing power of that screaming wind, and sensed, rather than felt, the awesome force of those mountainous seas thundering down on the *James Kennedy* with the crunching sound of huge boulders colliding. There was water everywhere, pelting down from above in the rain and rising in great shafts of spray and spume as the waves cracked and crashed on the wallowing freighter.

Jerry James was aghast. He opened his mouth and shouted something at Sandy, but the wind tore the words from his mouth. The two boys were forced to talk in gestures. Sandy laid down

his crowbar, placing a foot on it to keep it from rolling over the side. Then he pointed to the rail. He wound his rope around his waist. Next, he looped it over the railing, before fashioning a good strong slipknot. He backed off a few feet, the muscles of his calves straining to maintain a purchase on the slippery, heeling decks. Carefully, he tugged. The rope held. He nodded at Jerry and his friend followed suit. Once, just before Jerry had finished, the black-haired youth looked up and saw, in fright, a huge wave bearing down on them amidships. It struck the side just as the *James Kennedy* rolled away from it—luckily for the two youths.

The impact of that wave sent a long shiver through the 600-foot length of their freighter and what seemed a very wall of water shot high into the air before it fell on them with a drenching crash. It drove them to their knees.

So great was the shock, that neither Sandy nor Jerry could remember the sensation of coldness or wetness. All they could think of was that mighty weight that flattened them, almost driving the breath from their bodies.

Then the water began to wash away, and Sandy Steele felt an almost irresistible tug. Quickly, he wound his arms around the line he had only just

fastened to the railing. He tried to stand up, but the rushing water knocked his legs out from under him. He seemed immersed in a whitish, greenish froth, but then, as his eyes and ears cleared he saw the low clouds swinging overhead and the lake water boiling by beneath him, and heard the despairing cry of his friend:

"Help, Sandy! Help, I'm going!"

Too late, Jerry James had rushed to finish tying his slipknot. But he had it only half finished when the wave struck. The water swept him up like a chip and now it was rushing him toward his destruction, over the side.

Sandy Steele saw his friend's peril.

Without hesitation, he released his own grip on the line and dove for Jerry's body.

He dove against the water and he struck Jerry with a waist-high tackle.

As his wiry arms closed around his friend's middle, Sandy snapped his own body around in a half-twist, whirling himself against the pressure of the rope. It was well that he did, for the receding wave was pushing him in the other direction. That way, the rope would have unwound and the two boys would have rolled over the side and drowned.

But Sandy Steele's split-second thinking ap-

plied the pressure in the right place and the rope held.

Gasping, the two lay on the deck. They could see the angry, running seas beneath them, and then, as the *James Kennedy* heeled away, the rim of the lake and then only the clouds.

They were saved.

But they were too weak to congratulate each other, and all that Jerry James could do to show his gratitude was to flop his hand weakly on his friend's back. Now, as they blew lake water from their mouths, they were aware of the cold, of their drenched clothing clinging to their goose-pimpled flesh, and of the chill breath of the wind.

"Let's go!" Sandy finally shouted. "If we stand here, we may get socked with another one."

Jerry nodded and quickly secured himself to the rail, glancing up every now and then as though he expected to see another great black wave racing toward him. Then they made their way forward to the Number Four hatch where the little band of lake sailors struggled bravely to keep the lake out of the *James Kennedy*'s hold.

There were nine deck hands and one deck officer, a tall, serious-looking man named Davis. Through his water-filled eyes, Sandy could see that Mr. Davis had taped his spectacles securely to

his temples, for fear they would be washed away. He remembered Sam saying that Mr. Davis was "as blind as a bat" without his glasses. Sam was with the group, too—ordered down from the pilothouse by Captain West. That was probably because the skipper wanted to make good use of the great strength that lay in Sam's deep chest and thick shoulders. Sam swung a heavy sledge hammer, as he and two other men—one of them a blond, Swedish giant named Gunnar—attempted to batter the sprung steel hatch cover back into place. Sandy could hear the metallic clanging of their blows above the wind and sea as he and Jerry approached, both of them side-stepping along the rail while they clung to their ropes.

Then Mr. Davis yelled, "All hands to the rails!"

To his horror, Sandy saw that the *James Kennedy*'s prow had plunged into a wall of water that reared before it. The bow sliced into it as the *V* of a plow might pierce a snowbank—and though the boat itself remained steady, that parted wave was now flowing around either side of the forward cabins and sweeping down the decks!

Swiftly, the men whirled and scurried for the rails. They dove for them, in fact! They curled around them and bent and turned their heads

away from the onrushing water, and Sandy noticed that the hammer-swingers had fastened their tools to their wrists by thick lengths of rope.

Then the water hit.

It was far worse than the wave that had nearly carried Jerry James to his death.

But it did not last as long. It struck with swift savagery, lifting Sandy and Jerry and the rest of them from their feet. It sought to tear them free of the rail and drive them aft and into the water. But that great crushing blow and terrible tug was only of a few seconds' duration, and then it was gone.

Sandy looked around. Water was spilling back over the sides of the *James Kennedy,* but at the rail, where there had been ten men, there were now only eight.

Two men had been washed overboard, one of them a hammer man.

But there was little time to dwell upon the horror of those missing figures at the rail.

Mr. Davis had lost his glasses. The wave had torn them from his head. The tall deck officer peered wildly about him. He had backed from the rail, digging furiously at his eyes to clear them of water. Now, as he looked around him on the deck of the heaving ship, it was plain that he had

lost his bearings. He took a step forward. Another. Then, rapidly, two more. He was walking toward the rail!

Involuntarily, Sandy and Jerry took two steps toward him. But they were too far away.

Their friend Sam wasn't.

The stocky seaman with the muscles like steel hawsers swiftly shot out a clutching hand and stopped his superior officer before he drowned himself.

"You'll have to go back, sir!" Sam shouted above the wind. "You can't stay out here blinded like that. Here," he shouted at one of the men, "help Mr. Davis below."

The man wound a guiding arm around the deck officer, and together, they made their way aft along the rail.

Sam glanced at Sandy Steele and Jerry and shouted, "You two—we need your help. Come over here. That's right, pay out the line."

The two lads let go their tight hold on their safety lines and came over to the torn hatch, turning around and around to unwind their ropes.

"Now," Sam shouted again, cupping his hands so that he could be heard above the storm and the rattling of the ship. "Now, we can't waste any more time rushing over to the rail every time

we ship a little water. That last wave must have poured a couple of tons of water into the hold. A few more like that, and we'll be down in Davy Jones's locker. Here's what we're going to do.

"We've got eight men left and two sledge hammers. So, Gunnar here takes one hammer and I take the other. While we're hammering down the hatch cover, you three hold Gunnar," he said, pointing to a trio of seamen, "and you three hold me." He pointed to Sandy and Jerry and a fourth seaman. "If the water comes over the side again, well, we'll just have to ride it out. You men secure yourselves to those bits. And for gosh sakes," he yelled, his husky voice rising to full volume, "don't anybody let go of Gunnar or me when the water hits!"

Quickly, Sandy and Jerry did as they were ordered. They fastened themselves to those stubby, mushroom-shaped iron pegs that are called bits. Then, Jerry and the other seaman wound their arms around Sam's powerful legs and Sandy, because he was the tallest, grabbed him by the waist.

Sam and Gunnar got to work.

Their hammers clanged rapidly against the stubborn steel, forcing it down at a steady but agonizingly slow pace. Sandy marveled to feel the strength surging through Sam's hard torso,

as he hugged the sturdy seaman with all his might. Sam's chest heaved and the muscles of his back bunched as he brought the heavy hammer up and down, up and down.

Soon, Sandy's own body ached from the strain of holding Sam erect against the swaying and staggering of the *James Kennedy*. And the hole was being closed so slowly!

Once, a fair-sized wave swept suddenly over them. Sandy felt Sam go down under its onslaught, but he held him fast even though his body screamed in pain from the effort. The seaman and Jerry held on, too, and when the waters had spilled back into Lake Erie, a grinning Sam spat contemptuously and scrambled to his feet and swung his hammer again.

The resumed clanging of the hammer swung by Gunnar, the Swede, told Sandy that his crew had held fast as well.

Now, the hatch was closed. Sam and Gunnar were swiftly and skillfully pounding the steel snugly into place when a sudden gust of wind spun Sam around just as he was bringing his hammer down for the final blow.

Unable to stop himself, Sam now had his whistling sledge hammer aimed directly at the un-

suspecting head of Gunnar! In a fraction of a second, the iron hammerhead would drive deep into Gunnar's skull. It would smash it open as easily as an eggshell, with Sam's great strength propelling it.

In that tiny interval of time, Sandy Steele swiftly sat down. He buckled his legs and dragged Sam back with him, and as he did, he heard a familiar voice beneath him yelp with pain. There was a loud metallic clang—like the sound of a firebell—as Sam's sledge hammer swished harmlessly past the back of Gunnar's head and struck the steel deck with terrific force. But the big Swede had been saved, even if Sandy's friend Jerry seemed to have wound up a casualty.

He lay writhing on the deck and Sandy had to bend quickly to make sure the rolling of the ship didn't roll him over the side.

"What's wrong?" he shouted in Jerry's ear.

"My ankle," Jerry yelled back, grimacing. "I think it's sprained. When you fell on me, I guess."

Sandy groaned. He was sorry that his friend had been hurt, of course, but now, he realized, he would have to go it alone. He glanced up and saw the Swede staring down with a puzzled look on his face. His gaze wavered from Jerry to the spot

where Sam's hammer had struck, making him jump in surprise. Now Sam was waving his arms wildly and shouting an explanation of what had happened. As he spoke, Gunnar's mouth came open and his blue eyes grew round.

When Sam had finished, Gunnar came over to Sandy. He leaned down and yelled in his ear, "Tanks. You ban safe my life. You goot poy."

Sandy nodded, embarrassed. Then he said, "Can you help me move my friend? I think he's sprained his ankle."

Gunnar bent and lifted Valley View High School's husky right end as easily as a child. "Ay take him below," he said simply, shifting Jerry's weight to one side and supporting him with one huge arm, while with the other he held fast to the rail. He staggered off.

Sam grinned at Sandy. "Nice work, Sandy," he said, shouting through cupped hands again. "You sure made a friend today."

Sandy nodded. He had glanced up to see Captain West staring down at him from the pilothouse. It recalled to him that the most important mission of his voyage still lay ahead of him, and that his dependable friend, Jerry, probably would no longer be of help.

"I sure hope so, Sam," Sandy said. "Because I think I may be needing one."

Then Sandy Steele and Sam swayed aft with the rest of the *James Kennedy*'s weary deck hands.

CHAPTER TWELVE

A Web of Lies

JERRY JAMES'S ANKLE seemed swollen to twice its normal size by the time the big seaman, Gunnar, had carried him below and gently deposited him on the bottom bunk of Sandy's and Jerry's cabin.

"It's yust a sprain, Ay tank," Gunnar mumbled as he peered at the ankle after having removed Jerry's dripping clothing and wrapped him in blankets.

"Does it hurt much, Jerry?" Sandy asked anxiously.

Jerry tried to smile and shrug it off. But it was obvious to Sandy that his friend was in great pain. He turned around, bumping into Sam, who had also jammed himself into the tiny room. Outside

the open door, Mr. Briggs stared in at the scene with eyes of unpitying curiosity.

"Have you got any medicine, Sam?" Sandy asked. "I mean, something to kill his pain a little."

Sam shrugged. "Best thing that we can do is give him some rest and try to get that swelling down. He'll need a doctor's care when we get to port." He paused as the *James Kennedy* began to heel over in a long roll. Everybody reached for support, and Sam grinned and added, "*If* we get to port."

"We will," the mate butted in. "Captain just called down to say the wind's going down."

"Py yiminy," said the big Swede, beaming, "Ay tank Ay live long enough for farm, after all."

Sam smiled fondly at Gunnar. "You big galoot," he said, good-humoredly. "You can't stand to be ashore two days without getting landsick." He turned his gaze back to Jerry James. "You know," he said, "I think I've got just the thing to take down that swelling some and ease the pain, too."

"What's that?" Sandy asked.

"Well, seeing as how you must have swallowed a couple of bucketfuls of it yourself not long ago, I'll tell you. It's lake water!" He leaned out into the passageway and called, "Hey, one of you lads, get up above and fetch us a bucket of lake water,

hear?" Then he grinned, plainly enjoying himself. "All you have to do is stand on deck until the first wave comes along!"

In another five minutes, Jerry James had been carefully lifted into a sitting position by Gunnar and his sprained right foot had been thrust into a bucket of cold Lake Erie water. Jerry had winced at his first contact with it, but he soon grew accustomed to it. In half an hour more, the swelling had gone down considerably and Jerry was able to turn in with his ankle swathed in strips of sheeting soaked with water.

"Keep dousing it with water every hour or so," Sam had suggested to Sandy.

Then Sam and Gunnar had trudged back to the barren mess hall to join the rest of the crewmen who squatted glumly against the bulkheads, munching the hard biscuits and cold water passed out to them by a Cookie who seemed to have lost his usual cheerful spirits.

Up above, meanwhile, Captain West saw, to his alarm, that he had been mistaken about the storm. The winds had indeed died down, but only for a time.

Now, with the coming of darkness, they were again rising. What had resumed as the gentlest

of whispers was now a wild screaming and hammering around the pilothouse that threatened to smash in even those stoutly reinforced windows. The seas were again pounding. The *James Kennedy* seemed to be weakening. No longer did she plow ahead, straight and true, with the passage of each successive wave. Now she was wallowing in the troughs—and the thundering seas battered her mercilessly. Each time, she staggered and drove on. But each time, she seemed to drive on a little less powerfully.

The waves roared at her in combinations now —sometimes two waves following quickly upon another, frequently three.

Alone in his pilothouse, Captain West realized that a few hours more of such punishment would mean the end of his ship and all aboard her. Below, in the mess hall, the veteran sailors realized it, too. But they said nothing, merely exchanging fearful glances. Only God could save them now, they knew. In such a storm, even the most superb seamanship was useless.

Captain West knew it, too. He wondered if he should radio for help. But what good would that do? Who could get to him? Besides, Captain West had no wish to make contact with the mainland. The storm had given him his perfect excuse for

arriving in Buffalo too late to communicate with his employer, Mr. Kennedy. He wished to stay out of contact with the Kennedy offices for as long as possible.

But something had to be done. Quickly, Captain West bent over his chart. His eyes swept over it, eagerly searching for some island or outcropping of land to which he might run for shelter. All around him now were the voices of insane power, the clashing and crashing of that surging sea, the wailing of the wind. As Captain West bent his head, a great wall of water gathered before the *James Kennedy*'s bow.

It rose, black and awful, to the height of Captain West's pilothouse—and then it struck.

It fell with a roar. Captain West dove for a stanchion. He threw his arms around it and held on. The water burst the bulkheads of the pilothouse. It flattened those steel walls as though they were made of paper. It swept away the pilothouse as easily as a wave washing away a fruit crate.

Captain West heard that wrenching roar, and then the lake water poured over him. He clung desperately to the stanchion. He felt that monstrous weight—hundreds and hundreds of tons —driving the *James Kennedy* down and down,

and he wondered if the vessel would ever re-emerge from it.

Down below, in his tiny cabin, Sandy Steele held his breath as he felt that wave strike the ship and drive it down.

But the *James Kennedy* came up.

Buried though she had been, the gallant vessel shook herself like a soaked and weary mastiff, and her bow popped out of the frothing white seas, streaming water from every side—and she gave a long shudder and drove forward again.

A concerted sigh of relief broke from the throats of the lake sailors huddled in the mess hall.

Sandy Steele felt the light film of perspiration that had gathered on his forehead, and he involuntarily squeezed the arm of his friend.

Captain West slowly released his grip on the stanchion.

They had been through the worst of it, he knew now.

The wind was dropping as swiftly as it had risen. Above him, the clouds were thinning out. A ghostly glow seemed to illuminate the scene as the moon shone palely through them. In its light, Captain West could see the dark seas running around him, glittering like polished black glass.

Captain West surveyed the damage to his pilothouse. The compass was destroyed. The steering gear was so badly damaged that it would be impossible to make any headway against a strong wind. But the wind was falling to a murmur. He would be able to steer, and he would navigate by hand compass from one of the lifeboats.

He decided to wait another few minutes to be certain that the storm was over. Then he would go below to fetch Sam and the big Swede, Gunnar. He couldn't call them. The speaking system was ruined, too.

Captain West removed his hat and began to wring it dry. If he lived to be a hundred, he told himself, he would never see another wave like that one.

The men in the mess hall were in an ugly mood.

They knew that the worst was over, and so they had begun to grumble. With nothing to fear, they had time to complain. Mr. Briggs was quick to seize upon their discontent and turn it to his own ends.

He had been listening to two of them grumble bitterly about the fact that they had had noth-

ing solid to eat since lunch the day before. The smaller of the pair, a man with sharp features and untidy, mouse-colored hair, had begun to talk louder and louder.

"Thirty-six hours, Dick," he complained. "Thirty-six hours since we've had a real bite or a hot sup. Nothing but hard biscuits and stale water."

"Aye," said his friend heavily. "And whose fault is it? What are we doing out on Erie at a time like this, when we could be ashore in Detroit? We could be drinking our coffee nice and easy in some restaurant right now. Whose fault is it? That's what I want to know."

Mr. Briggs's little eyes roved rapidly over the mess hall. He saw with satisfaction that Sam and Gunnar had dozed off. He sidled over to the two discontented men, who had begun to cast dark, threatening glances about them as though they sought the author of their misfortunes.

"Who's to blame, you say?" Mr. Briggs whispered, glancing quickly around him. "I'll tell you." He pointed down the passageway. "It's those snippy brats of Old Man Kennedy's, that's who's to blame!" he burst out.

"Oh, come, now," the little man named Bogert

said. "Don't tell me that a couple of vacationing high school boys have anything to do with running this ship."

"Just listen to me!" Mr. Briggs said fiercely. "Who do you think caused that fire in the galley last night? It was those two blasted brats tomfoolin' around, that's who it was! If you're wondering who you've got to thank for your empty bellies, it's those kids down the way. Especially the blond one. Every last scrap of decent food was burned up in that fire. That's why you're getting biscuits and water."

The two men exchanged angry glances. Seeing that he had convinced them, Mr. Briggs rushed on.

"And why are we out on Lake Erie instead of being berthed in Detroit? That's their fault, too! The skipper didn't want to make for Buffalo so soon. But he had to. With a couple of firebugs like them aboard, he said he couldn't take any chances!"

The big man named Dick let out a low growl.

"How about Perkins, Dick?" the mate added, deliberately attempting to goad the big man into a rage. "Perkins was your friend, wasn't he, Dick? And now he's on the bottom of Lake Erie, washed

over the side in a storm we never should have been in! All because of a couple of dirty brats who haven't shaved yet!"

The big man shook his head. He got to his feet and gazed down at the mate. He clenched and unclenched his hamlike hands and another deep growl rumbled from his chest.

"What are you going to do, Dick?" his friend Bogert asked. The little man was slightly nervous.

"I'm gonna pay 'em back," the big man said slowly. He blinked his eyes stupidly. "I've been starvin' and I lost my best friend and I almost got washed overboard myself and it's all on account of them kids. I'm gonna pay 'em back, Bogert." He turned to the mate and growled, "Where are they?"

But he needn't have asked.

At that moment, Sandy Steele walked down the hall with a bucket. He needed more water to freshen his friend's bandages.

"There he is!" the mate shouted. "There's the wise one—the one that called me a liar!"

The big man whirled and pounced. Before Sandy knew what was happening, he had been grasped by the collar and spun around. There was not even time to struggle. The big man held him

firmly in that left hand and drew back his big right fist for a smashing blow.

"Wise kid," Dick muttered. "I'm gonna give you a good one from old Perkins."

Sandy started to duck.

But the blow never landed.

Instead, it was Dick himself who was whirled around now, while an angry voice said, "Ay tank Ay give you goot wan."

Then there was a sharp spat of bone meeting bone. An expression of amazement came over Dick's face. Then his face went blank and his knees buckled and he sank gently to the deck.

Gunnar smiled and lifted his enormous right fist for the rest of the shocked sailors to see.

"Ay yust tell you maybe Ay hit real hard next time."

Murmurs of admiration came from the lips of the onlookers, and at that moment, Mr. Briggs sought to steal from the room. But Sam, who had also been awakened, moved to head him off.

"What's your hurry, mate?" he asked easily.

"Well, er, I was, er, just going to . . ." Mr. Briggs stammered, clearing his throat. He cast a nervous glance at the big Swede, who stood glaring at him while, behind him, the big man, Dick, slowly pushed himself up from the deck. "Well,

you see—" the mate stuttered, but then his eyes lost their fear and his face grew spiteful and defiant again as Captain West came sloshing into the room.

"What's going on here?" he bellowed.

Every head spun toward him and there was a babble of excited voices in reply. But, of course, it was Mr. Briggs who answered the skipper's question.

"Oh, nothing at all, sir," he said, giving Captain West a broad wink. "Just a bit of friendly horseplay, that's all, sir."

Captain West grunted and nodded. Then he said, "You, there, Sam and Gunnar. Get up above to the pilothouse. A wave swept everything but the deck away, but you can still steer by hand compass. Get one from one of the lifeboats. The rest of you," he roared, whirling quickly, "the rest of you get back where you belong. The storm's over! We'll make Buffalo by tomorrow night."

A weak cheer followed that news. The men shuffled down the passageway. Captain West waited until the sailors had gotten out of earshot, before he jerked a rude thumb at Sandy and growled, "He making trouble again?"

The mate nodded. "Just before you came be-

low, he stirred up a fight between Dick and the Swede."

Sandy Steele sucked his breath in sharply.

"That's a lie!" he burst out sharply.

Captain West ignored his protest. He merely glared savagely at Sandy and said, "Shut up!" He seemed to be pondering something. Then, his forehead smoothed out and he spoke to his mate.

"Briggs, we're only a few hours away from that Chadwick-Kennedy deal. I'm taking no chances on Buster, here. So, he's yours until we dock tomorrow night. Take him into your cabin with you and batten down the door. Don't come out until I send for you. You hear me?"

The mate nodded glumly. "Don't I get nothin' to eat?" he whined.

"Stop bleating about your blasted belly," the captain snapped. "I'll send Cookie in to you. Now, now, hold on! Whoa! What about the other brat? Where's he?"

"In bed," the mate said. "He sprained his ankle during the storm."

"Bad?"

Mr. Briggs grinned evilly.

"Bad enough to keep him in bed."

"Good," Captain West said. "Now, get out of here—and don't let me see your ugly face until

we dock in Buffalo. And as for him," he went on, jerking his head toward Sandy, "I don't *ever* want to see *his* face again!"

Sadly assuring himself that the feeling was mutual, Sandy Steele preceded the mate down the passageway to his cabin.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Cookie to the Rescue

SANDY STEELE was not a quitter, yet it seemed to him that the game was over and he had lost.

He sat on the bunk in Mr. Briggs's cabin, with the mate leering at him from a corner chair, and miserably considered his own plight. There didn't seem to be any way out. Jerry James could not move from his bed for another day or two, so there was no help there. And here *he* was, a prisoner!

There wasn't any way in the world for him to reach Mr. Kennedy.

Sandy shook his blond head mournfully. Seeing his gesture, the mate read the feeling behind it and said, "If you had the brains you were born with, you'd forget about everything and go to sleep."

Sandy's face went cold. He pretended not to have heard, but the mate was not to be denied his favorite pleasure of gloating.

"Ma Kennedy's little chick's lost its tongue, eh?" he sneered. "Too bad you ain't going to see Ma Kennedy before tomorrow night. And by that time, the skipper'll be the chief captain of the Chadwick-Kennedy Line, and yours truly'll be a full master."

Oho, Sandy thought to himself, so that's the mate's reward for his treachery. He decided to remain quiet. The talkative Mr. Briggs might give away some more secrets.

"Don't think you can outwait me," Mr. Briggs went on. "You're the one who needs the sleep—not me. While you heroes was battling the storm this afternoon, I was having myself a little rest. So I'm fresh as a daisy."

Sandy still said nothing.

"And furthermore," the mate snapped, plainly nettled, "even if I did doze off, it wouldn't help you." He tapped his breast pocket. "The key to that there door is tucked away in here. You'd have to kill me to get it."

Sandy smiled, and the mate lost his temper.

"Why, you—" he began, but just then there was a knock on the door.

"Who's there?" the mate called.

"It's me. Cookie."

Mr. Briggs relaxed. "Got some grub, hey, Cookie?"

"Yessirree. Got a little hot coffee, too."

"Hot coffee!" the mate exclaimed, jumping to his feet and opening the door to let Cookie enter. "How on earth did you ever rustle that up?"

"Oh, just a little of Cookie's magic," the little bald-headed man chuckled as he slipped through the door carrying a tray.

Sure enough! He did have hot coffee! The aroma of it filled Sandy's nostrils and his mouth watered.

He smiled fondly at Cookie, and then, to his shocked disbelief, the little man's face went ugly with hatred.

"Don't smirk at me, you Jonah, you!" Cookie shrilled. "I've had nothing but bad luck since you and your friend came aboard this ship!" Sandy recoiled from the little man as though he had been struck, and Cookie raged on, "Yes, I mean you, Sandy Steele! First, I nearly drown because of you. Then, you and your stupid friend burn my galley down. And now look at the mess everybody's in because of your silly meddling!" Sandy shrank away from him, as insult after insult fell

from the little man's trembling lips—to the intense delight of Mr. Briggs.

But Cookie, who had set his tray on the table, moved closer and closer toward Sandy, until he had poked his wrinkled little face within a few inches of the youth's nose.

Then he winked and grinned.

Sandy Steele's heart leaped for joy, and he almost jumped up and kissed the little man. As it was, he knew his face must have given him away, for Cookie had quickly flashed him a warning look, before be began backing away, still mouthing insults.

Sandy felt better when he saw Mr. Briggs slap Cookie on the back and heard him say, "Cookie, I couldn't have said it better myself. The only thing I can add to what you've said is that those brats are twice as bad as you say they are."

Still sputtering angrily, Cookie bent to his tray and began pouring the mate a cup of steaming hot coffee.

Determined to play his part, Sandy put a pleading note into his voice and said, "Aw, Cookie —how about some coffee?"

"You?" Cookie burst out, enraged. "I wouldn't give you a glass of lake water if you were dying of thirst!"

"Heh, heh," the mate laughed, evidently pleased that the little man shared his sentiments. "You're in a rare mood tonight, Cookie. Why don't you sit down and talk a bit."

"I will," Cookie said. He took a seat, carefully smoothing his stained white apron. He watched the mate take a sip. "How's the coffee, mate?" he asked.

"Fine, Cookie—fine."

"Ah, yes, hot coffee's good after a storm. Especially with a shot of rum in it."

"Rum? Did you say rum?"

With a sly wink, Cookie reached behind him and under his apron. He brought out a bottle and brandished it happily.

"Aye, rum, mate." He cast a dark look at Sandy. "It's all that could be salvaged from the fire. I'd been saving it to make mince meat." He unscrewed the cap and tilted it to pour it into the mate's cup. "Here, a little of this'll warm your belly."

"Oh, no, no, no!" the mate chattered, holding up a hand to block Cookie. "I'd like to, Cookie—I swear I would! But I'd better not."

"Why not?" Cookie asked innocently. "A man's got a right to a proper drink after a storm."

"Well, er," the mate stammered, "as a matter of

fact, the skipper, er, suggested to me that I'd better not."

"Of course," Cookie agreed, raising the bottle again. "But that was before the storm. Now, you know Captain West would never begrudge a man a snort after coming through what we've been through."

Cookie's voice was so easy and coaxing that Sandy marveled to hear it. And the mate could not resist it.

"Well, Cookie, since you put it that way, I suppose you're right. But, just a little, now. Whoa, whoa! That's plenty!"

"Oh-oh," Cookie said, with exaggerated concern, "I hadn't really meant to put that much in."

"No harm done," Mr. Briggs said grandly. "No harm done, really."

"Well, I'm certainly glad to hear that."

"Perfectly okay, Cookie, perfectly okay. By the way, aren't you going to have a spot yourself?"

"Well, I don't mind if I do. Here, I'll just try a little in this cup here."

They gabbed on like that for a few minutes, their talk reaching Sandy's ears against the background of the mate's noisy sipping of his coffee. For a while, Sandy ignored their conversation. He

was too busy trying to figure out what Cookie was up to.

Obviously, the little man was trying to get the mate drunk. But why? Cookie knew nothing of the forthcoming deal between Paul Chadwick and Mr. Kennedy. At least, so Sandy thought. So he could not understand Cookie's actions. But he did see that the little man's plan was working. As time wore on, and the heaving of the *James Kennedy* became less and less pronounced, Sandy noticed that the words of Mr. Briggs were also becoming less pronounced. His voice was thickening. He was not even aware that Cookie's drinks had dwindled away to almost nothing, while his own had swelled in size.

"By the way, mate," Cookie said, as Mr. Briggs's head began to loll on his shoulders. "I've got a funny one to tell you."

"Whash that, Cookie, ol' pal?"

"It's about that big Swede, Gunnar. He told me he was going to use the ship-to-shore telephone to call his girl-friend back in Duluth. I told him he was crazy because it's against the ship's rules to use the ship-to-shore."

"Right, thash right. Phone's locked up, anyway."

"But you know what that big stupe said? He

said he'd be able to make the call in spite of that, because he knew that if he gave you five dollars you'd give him the key."

The mate's brow darkened.

"He'sh a liar," he mumbled. "Never take bribe."

"He said you did," Cookie rushed on eagerly. "In fact, he showed me the key."

"Liar!" the mate repeated. "He'sh liar!" He leaned forward drunkenly and with a knowing leer on his face, he tapped Cookie on the knee. "I'll prove it," he mumbled. "Prove he'sh liar." He fumbled in his side pocket. Then he drew out a bunch of keys on a ring. "Here'sh key!" he gloated, swaying as he attempted to thump his chest. "Gunnar's big liar. Mr. Briggs don't take bribes."

"Well, well," Cookie said, shaking his head as though grieved. "To think he'd tell me a big one like that. Here, mate, have another drink."

But the mate did not answer.

His head had sagged forward on his chest.

Raising his voice, Cookie repeated his request. But the mate still did not reply.

With a glance of utmost contempt, Cookie reached forward and grasped his shoulder and shook him gently.

"Have a drink, mate," he said.

The mate's mouth fell open and his head snapped back and a long, whistling snore broke from his throat.

With a grin of triumph, Cookie got to his feet. He walked over to Sandy and stuck out his hand.

"Shake, pal," he whispered.

With eyes shining with gratitude, Sandy Steele clasped his little friend's hand. He realized, now, that Cookie must know everything—else why all that nonsense to find out where the key to the radio shack was located. For that ship-to-shore telephone was Sandy Steele's only hope!

"Wait ten more minutes," Cookie whispered. "Wait until he's so sound asleep we can get that key away from him without waking him."

Sandy nodded. He sat on his bunk for a time, watching the first pale light of dawn growing steadily brighter outside, and as the day brightened, his spirits soared with it. At last, his chance had come!

Cookie arose and moved softly to the snoring mate. He put his mouth to his ear, and said in a loud voice, "Have another drink, mate."

Mr. Briggs's answer was a sputtering snore.

Cookie slapped him sharply on the cheek and cried, "Wake up, mate." Mr. Briggs slept on as though made of stone.

With another cocky grin, the little man reached down into Mr. Briggs's side pocket and pulled out his set of keys. He found the one he wanted, separated it from the rest, removed it—and then stuck the others back where they had come from.

"Let's go," he said to Sandy.

"Sure you have the right key, Cookie?" Sandy asked.

"Sure. I'd know it anywhere. Come on, follow me."

As they went out, Cookie removed the key that the mate had left in the lock when he opened the door to admit him. When they had stepped out into the corridor, he closed the door softly behind him and locked it.

"Just in case," he chirped, putting the key in his pocket.

Then the two made their way to the radio shack.

"Shhh!" Cookie said, as he quietly unlocked the door to the radio shack. "Don't show a light either." He glanced rapidly around him. "There," he said, pointing to an object standing alongside a radio transmitter. "That's it."

A tingling thrill shot through Sandy Steele's body as his eyes pierced the dim light that filtered

through a porthole and fell on the ship-to-shore telephone.

"You use it just like any other telephone," Cookie whispered, as he bent to lock the door. "Just give the operator the letters there at the bottom, and then give her the number you want."

Sandy Steele groaned.

"I don't know Mr. Kennedy's number," he said.

Cookie's brow puckered. "Well, ask the operator to locate him for you. She might help."

She did.

"You see," Sandy explained, once the operator had let him know she was on the line, "all I know about Mr. Kennedy is that he lives in Buffalo and that he owns the Kennedy Shipping Lines. Is that enough to go on?"

His heart sang when a pert voice replied, "I think so. Would you hold on, please?"

"Yes," Sandy said, and then his heart stopped singing as another voice, neither pert nor far away, roared from outside the door.

"Who's in that radio shack?"

It was the voice of Captain West.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Checkmated

JOHN KENNEDY was an early riser. He had been so all his life. He had made no exception to his custom on this warm summer morning, rising with the first light of dawn.

But he was not happy to greet this day. It would mark the sale of the shipping line that had been in his family for close to a century. Though he hurried through his bath with his usual brisk, sure motions, Mr. Kennedy was a sorrowing man by the time he had walked out on the sundeck of his big stone house on Delaware Avenue.

Mechanically unwrapping his napkin and spreading it on his lap, he gazed without appetite at the breakfast laid out for him. His ears were deaf to the morning song of the birds, and his eyes

were blind to the pleasant prospect of the gardens and green lawns that stretched away beneath him.

With a sigh, Mr. Kennedy picked up his knife and fork and began to eat.

There was the sound of footsteps and Mr. Kennedy glanced up to see his valet advancing timidly toward him.

"Well, Jenkins?"

"I, I'm sorry to disturb you, sir—but there's a young gentleman on the telephone."

"Jenkins," Mr. Kennedy said gently, struggling to conceal his irritation, "must I repeat my very plain orders that I am not to be disturbed at breakfast?"

The valet's face turned a deep red. He began to back away apologetically.

"I beg your pardon, sir. I will inform young Mr. Steele that he may call later."

Mr. Kennedy's eyebrows rose. "Steele? Did he say his name was Steele?"

"Yes, sir. He was quite excited, sir. Something to do with a discovery of ore, I gathered." The butler shrugged with an apologetic air. "However, I will do as you say, sir." He turned to go, and was all but knocked off his feet by the elderly, white-haired tornado that had shot past him.

Upon hearing those two words—"Steele" and

"ore"—Mr. Kennedy had not hesitated. He had thrown down his fork, torn his napkin from his knees and leaped from his chair to bound into his bedroom and the telephone on his bedside table. Jenkins was shocked. He had never seen Mr. Kennedy run before—and never, never heard him shout over the telphone.

"Wha-a-at? What's that, boy? Speak up, Sandy, I can't hear you. What *is* that dreadful hammering noise?"

Wham! Wham! Wham!

That dreadful, hammering noise which Mr. Kennedy heard was the sound of a sledge hammer striking the door of the radio shack. Captain West was trying to batter it down.

He had run for a sledge hammer the moment he realized that his shouted commands to open the door were being ignored. Cookie stood a little aside, staring out of frightened eyes as the door jumped under the captain's powerful, bludgeoning blows.

"Hurry, Sandy," he whispered feverishly. "Oh, hurry! The lock's going to give in another minute."

Sandy had nodded. His own eyes were fastened on the door; his heart seemed to thump in time

to Captain West's hammering; he cradled the telephone as he waited for Mr. Kennedy in an agony of desperation.

It was at this point that Sandy Steele at last heard the familiar voice of Mr. Kennedy come over the line.

Now, Sandy Steele did not care whether Captain West heard him or not. He began to shout to make himself heard.

"Mr. Kennedy, don't sell your boats!"

"What? What's that, boy?"

"I said, don't sell your boats. The ore! My father has discovered big deposits of high-grade ore!"

There was a long silence at the other end. Then Sandy heard Mr. Kennedy say: "Boy, I hope you know what you're talking about. That's mighty important news."

"Oh, I do, sir! My father told me all about it just before we left Two Harbors."

There was another pause, during which the hammering outside the door became more insistent. Sandy could hear the lock beginning to give.

"That's very strange, Sandy," Mr. Kennedy said doubtfully. "I should think I would have heard of it before now."

"You were supposed to, you were supposed to, sir!" Sandy shouted. "That's what all that hammering's about, sir. It's Captain West trying to break into the radio shack. He doesn't want you to know!" Sandy caught his breath and went on, "I hate to tell you this, sir, but I'm afraid Captain West has been working for Mr. Chadwick and against you."

This time, the silence at the other end was so prolonged that Sandy feared he had been disconnected. At last, Mr. Kennedy spoke again, sadly.

"Sandy, a moment ago, you lifted my spirits as they have seldom been lifted. But, just now, you drove them down again with about the worst piece of news I've ever heard. Let me speak to Captain West."

Wham! Crrrash! Snap!

At that moment, with a blow of demonic strength, the enraged Captain West burst the last shred of the barrier separating him from Sandy Steele.

He charged into the room shouting threats and with his eyes shooting sparks of hatred. As he did, Sandy held out the telephone to him, and said, "Mr. Kennedy would like to speak to you."

All of Captain West's bluster and bravado

seemed to vanish at the sight of that tall, blond boy who had stood so unflinchingly in his path and now extended the telephone toward him with that calm announcement. The fight went out of his eyes. The color drained from his face. His powerful shoulders sagged and his whole body seemed to slump.

Without a word, Captain West turned and dragged himself from the room.

"He doesn't want to speak to you, sir."

"So it's true, then! Well, get me someone else in authority, Sandy. Put Mr. Briggs on."

Sandy paused, awkwardly.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Kennedy, but I think the mate was working against you, too."

"Oh, Lord, Lord! Am I surrounded by unfaithful employees? Goodness, is there no one on the *James Kennedy* that I can trust except you, boy? Who else is there in authority?"

"There's Mr. Davis, sir—the next officer. But he's lost his glasses and can't see. We've just been through a terrible storm, sir."

"Yes, yes, I read about it in the newspapers. But I thought you would be in port at Detroit. Is there no one else?"

Sandy pondered. Then his face brightened. "There's Sam and Gunnar."

"Sam! Who on earth is Sam? Oh, no, no—never mind, Sandy. Forget that question. Goodness knows I have good reason to trust your judgment. Put Sam on, whoever he is!"

Sandy grinned.

"Get Sam up here, Cookie," he shouted. Then, returning to Mr. Kennedy, he asked, "Anything else, sir?"

"Anything else! My goodness, boy—what else is there? For the second time within a week, I find myself in your debt."

Sandy was too embarrassed to make any comment, and Mr. Kennedy rushed on, "I don't know how to thank you, boy—but I'll think of something. Remember, you're to call me the moment you arrive in Buffalo. Both you and your friend. By the way, how is he?"

"Jerry? Oh, he's all right, sir—just a sprained ankle from the storm."

"My goodness! You have had a stormy voyage, haven't you?"

Sandy grinned again, remembering the plunge into Lake Superior to save Cookie, the fire in the galley as the *James Kennedy* steamed into Lake Huron, that spanking storm on Lake Erie—to say nothing of the combined badgering of Mr. Briggs and Captain West. But Sandy saw no

reason to tell Mr. Kennedy exactly how right he was. He just felt good, that was all—so he grinned again and said: "Yes, sir, I guess you could call it a stormy voyage. Here's Sam."

Sam stepped up and took the telephone from Sandy's outstretched hand. His manner was hesitant, for he had never spoken to the owner of the line before. His face was grave, but as he listened, his eyes grew wider and wider. Finally, with an expression of amazement and a snappy, "Yes, sir!" he hung up and turned to Sandy and Cookie.

"Well, what do you know?" he murmured.

"Well, what?"

"I'm in charge!"

Cookie's mouth popped open. He began to dance in excitement, flipping his apron in the air. "Hooray for Sam!" he shouted. "Yippee! Yip, yip —yippeee!"

"All right, Cookie," Sam cautioned, laughing. "Take it easy, now. It's only until we get to Buffalo."

"Who cares?" Cookie yelled. "Let's celebrate, anyway. I'll bake a cake!"

Both Sandy and Sam had to laugh again at the capering little man. His eyes shone when he promised to bake a cake, but when Sandy re-

minded him that he would have to do it with burned flour, a sly look came over his face and he pointed an accusing finger at the blond youth and shouted, "It's all his fault, Skipper! There's the culprit! That's the landlubber who burned down my nice, new galley!"

Sandy grinned happily. "Honestly, Cookie, you should have been an actor. Why, I almost believed those things you said about me, myself." His face turned serious. "How did you know about Mr. Briggs and Captain West, anyway?"

"I heard 'em talking," Cookie said simply. "The night of the fire, you put me in the mate's cabin, remember? Well, it was after they called you in that I overheard them talking about Mr. Kennedy selling out to Chadwick." Cookie struck his fist into his palm savagely. "Chadwick!" he said. "Me sail on another Chadwicker? I'd sooner die on land! No, sir, Sandy, when I heard that, I knew I had to help you. I told myself I'd swim all the way to Buffalo with you on my back, if it meant blocking that deal."

"But you can't swim, Cookie."

"No matter," the little man said grimly. "I'd've done it. I'd do anything, before I'd sail a Chadwicker again."

Of course, that unhappy notion was no longer a possibility—not after the scene which took place in Mr. Kennedy's office several hours after Sandy and Cookie and Sam had gone below to break the news to Jerry James.

Mr. Paul Chadwick had arrived and been ushered into Mr. Kennedy's conference room, where the lawyers of both firms had assembled to handle the details of the sale. Mr. Chadwick came striding in. He was a fat, pompous man with pouches beneath his pale eyes. He had a sharp way of speaking and he ordered his employees around as if he thought they belonged to him, body and soul.

"Well, Kennedy," he shot out as he took a seat at the table, "I presume everything is in readiness?"

"Yes, Paul," Mr. Kennedy said softly. "Everything is set."

"Good. All right, Cogswell," he snapped, turning to one of his lawyers. "Let's have the papers. Quick, man! The papers. Don't dawdle like a kindergarten child; give me the papers!"

Red-faced, the lawyer pulled a legal-looking document from his brief case and passed it to Mr. Chadwick. In the embarrassed silence that followed, the only sound that could be heard

was the scratching of Mr. Chadwick's pen as he hurriedly signed his name.

"Here, John," he said grandly, passing the document across the table. "Now, you sign right there. And, then, the Kennedy boats will belong to me."

"I think not, Paul," Mr. Kennedy said easily as he accepted the papers and tore them swiftly in two. "I think they'll still belong to me."

He handed the torn contract back to his astounded shipping rival. Mr. Chadwick stared at the pieces in disbelief.

"But this is preposterous!" he shouted. "You can't do this to me! You agreed to sell, Kennedy. Why, why," he spluttered, his cheeks puffing out like a frog's, "why, I'll sue!"

"Go ahead, Paul," Mr. Kennedy said, getting to his feet. "And, by the way, you may be getting busy soon, shipping all that new, high-grade ore down from the Mesabi—as I expect to—and you may find yourself in need of a skipper or a mate." He smiled. "I know just the men for you, Paul. Fine, dependable men—men like Captain West or Mr. Briggs."

A shadow of dismay passed over Mr. Chadwick's pale eyes. Without a word, he jumped to his feet and hurried from the room.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Safe in Port

THAT NIGHT, under a star-dusted sky, with the lights of Buffalo to guide her and beckon her on, the battered *James Kennedy* limped into port.

And waiting to greet her, in addition to her owner and his personal physician, was a throng of chattering newspaper reporters and photographers. The tale of the *James Kennedy*'s ordeal at sea had preceded her. Even as the vessel was slowly warped into her berth, photographers raced alongside her in excitement—eagerly snapping pictures of her damaged superstructure with its wrecked pilothouse. The flashing of their light bulbs added to the general air of excitement.

The moment the ship was securely in port, the newspapermen came hurrying up the gangplank.

"Where's the skipper?" they shouted. "Where's Captain West?"

"There he is!" one of them shouted in dismay. "He's gone ashore already."

True enough. The moment the newshawks had come aboard the *James Kennedy* and spilled over her decks, Captain West had seized the chance to slip down the gangplank. Now he was hastening out of sight. He all but broke into a run when he heard the yell of the newsman who had identified him. But he slowed again when he saw that his path would take him past Mr. John Kennedy, the employer he had attempted to betray. His step faltered. He tried to lift his eyes to the level of Mr. Kennedy's, to brazen it out. But he could not. His gaze fell.

He slunk by and disappeared in the darkness.

With a heavy sigh, Mr. Kennedy turned to the man beside him and said, "Come, Doctor—we'd better have a look at that James boy."

The two men made their way up the gangplank.

"Sandy!" Mr. Kennedy exclaimed, when he caught sight of the tall, blond youth standing at the head of the ramp. "Goodness, boy, I'm certainly glad to see you." His face took on a worried look and his eyes searched Sandy Steele's lanky

frame. "You're all right, aren't you, boy? I mean, I certainly wouldn't want John Steele holding me responsible for—"

"Oh, I'm fine, sir," Sandy said, smiling. "Just a bit hungry, that's all."

"We'll fix that soon enough," Mr. Kennedy vowed. "But let's have a look at your friend first. Where is he?"

"Down below, sir. Here, I'll lead the way."

Sandy and Mr. Kennedy and the physician, whose name was Dr. Hilliard, disappeared down the hatch. As they did, a tall, thin, furtive figure crept around the cabin. It glanced around fearfully, before sneaking down the gangplank and running up the wharf.

It was Mr. Briggs.

Below, meanwhile, Dr. Hilliard had gently unwrapped the torn sheets bound around Jerry James's ankle. He studied the injured member with professional concern. Both Jerry and Sandy watched his face anxiously, for both of them were thinking of the football season that lay ahead.

"John," Dr. Hilliard said, with mock gravity, "if they had more people like this young oak stump around, I'd be out of business."

"Hooray!" Sandy cried, and Jerry James grinned with delight.

"Of course," the doctor hurried on, "you'll need a cane for a week or two, young man. But otherwise I'd say you're none the worse for wear."

At that remark, Jerry winked at his friend. He rubbed his stomach sorrowfully. "Outside of being hungry, Doctor, I'd say—"

Mr. Kennedy broke in.

"Boys," he said, glancing at his watch, "I promise you that in fifteen minutes you will be in my dining room sitting down to the best meal that was ever served up in Buffalo."

And they were.

Less than a week later, the two friends were back on the Great Lakes again—bound for Minnesota once more, this time to ship aboard a load of grain.

They had had a wonderful time as the guests of Mr. Kennedy. They saw all the sights of Buffalo, including Niagara Falls, that great escarpment over which Lake Erie plunges, and they had crossed the Peace Bridge into Canada to have one of those famous beefsteaks at the Chinaman's in Fort Erie. Then, after Dr. Hilliard had pronounced Jerry James fit to walk again without the use of his cane, they had taken ship again.

Their vessel was now the *Cecil Rogers* (almost

all Great Lakes boats are named for shipping leaders), for the beloved old *James Kennedy* was in drydock undergoing extensive repairs.

And their new skipper was?

"Sam!" the two youths cried as they came aboard.

Sure enough, it was their old friend, and there was Cookie, too, grinning at them from over the rail. And there was Gunnar towering behind him!

"Boys," Sam said, chuckling, "meet my mate."

There were shouts of jubilation and handshaking all around as Sandy and Jerry got their gear aboard ship and into their quarters. This time, they had a room twice as large as the rathole they had shared on the *James Kennedy*. And this time, aboard the *Cecil Rogers,* they shipped as deck hands.

"No more galley slavery for us," Jerry exclaimed, and Sandy nodded in agreement.

That was how the two lads from Valley View passed the remainder of that summer. They sailed up and down the Lakes, as the *Cecil Rogers* hauled its cargoes of ore, grain and coal. Sometimes they made Canadian ports, and once they passed through the Welland Ship Canal into Lake Ontario, the lake that lies the farthest east.

At last came the sad day when they had to re-

claim Old Faithful from the hands of Sandy's dad and say goodbye to their friends. School would reopen in another week, and they had to be heading west.

"Gootpy, poys," Gunnar called from the rail, as Jerry's jalopy began to chug away from the loading dock where the *Cecil Rogers* lay. "Haf goot trip."

"Send us a picture of your football team," Cookie yelled, and Sam shouted, "Keep your chin up, boys. Maybe we'll see you next summer."

"Goodbye, goodbye," Sandy Steele and Jerry James cried, and then they were out of sight.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Summer's End

THERE WAS a hint of autumn in the air as Jerry James swung Old Faithful off the highway and up the ramp leading to Valley View. Both boys felt a deep surge of pleasure run through them as they picked out the familiar landmarks that told them they had come home again.

The dusty old jalopy rolled along Ridge Road and past the March mansion.

"Doesn't look like anybody's home," Sandy said.

"That's what I thought," said Jerry. "I wonder what happened to our friend Pepper."

Sandy shrugged. "I don't know. But it sure was good spending all those weeks without him. Jerry!" he yelled. "Did you hear that?"

Jerry James had, and his eyes sparkled with delight.

What the two boys had heard was the unmistakable thud of a foot meeting pigskin!

"Boy!" Sandy said. "I can hardly wait for school to open. Sounds funny, I know, but if the fall means school, it means football, too!"

"You bet, Sandy. The only thing I missed on the Great Lakes was not having a chance to practice."

"Oh, we'll be all right. At least, we stayed in shape."

They had. They were as hard as the decks of the *James Kennedy* and their bodies were burned the color of walnut.

"Well, here we are," Sandy said, as Old Faithful swung into his street. Jerry nodded. In another instant, he had mechanically lifted his foot from the gas pedal, as he always did when he approached Sandy's house, and the jalopy had begun to slow down. Grasping his jam-packed suitcase in one hand, Sandy Steele vaulted lightly to the pavement. "See you tonight at the drugstore, Jerry," he called, and then he turned and ran into the house.

"Mom!" Sandy Steele called as the screen door

slammed shut behind him. "Mom! It's me. Sandy. I'm home!"

The whole crowd from Valley View High had gathered at the James drugstore that night, and, of course, most of the talk was about how the school's football team would fare in the league competition that season, and especially how its heroes stacked up against those from the arch rivals in Poplar City.

As usual, Quiz Taylor was the center of a crowd as he spieled off the weight, height and past season's record of nearly all the boys who would be playing for Poplar City in the coming fall.

"Honestly, fellows," he said, his round face gloomy, "I don't see how we can beat them. Of course, we have Jerry and Sandy, but we don't have a runner to compare with their fullback, Tomkins."

"What about Pepper March?" someone asked. "He scored six touchdowns for Valley View last year."

"Yes, Quiz," Sandy said. "What about Pepper? Where is he, anyway? You'd think he'd be here, the night before school opens."

Quiz Taylor began to shake with laughter.

"D-didn't you hear about Pepper?" he sput-

tered, his face crinkling with merriment. "Haven't you heard about what happened to Stanley Peperdine March?"

"No. What happened?"

"Yeah, Quiz," someone else said. "Cut the comedy, and let us in on the joke, too."

Still chuckling, Quiz Taylor said, "Pepper won't be home for another two weeks. A couple of the sailors aboard that ship they were on came down with one of those rare, tropical diseases. Pepper and his father had to spend the summer in quarantine."

There was a roar of laughter at the expense of the unpopular Pepper.

Sandy Steele turned to his friend and said, "Well, Jerry, we may have had a stormy voyage, but I'll bet we had a better summer than Pepper did."

And so they had.